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Kenyan death cult suffocated my baby as its followers clapped and cheered

MATTHEW CAMPBELL



Shakahola, Kenya

Stephen Mwiti holds up a blue check shirt and dark shorts that Samuel, his eldest son, wore to school. They and a few old photographs are all he has left of the children and wife he lived with in Malindi, a tourist town on the Kenyan coast.

It is early morning. Outside, through the door of Mwiti's one-room home, I can see other children in the same check shirt making

their way through the slum along a path of red earth to school.

But Samuel will not need the school uniform his mother, Joan, made for him any more. The nine-year-old and five younger siblings starved to death in a forest along with Joan after she joined a cult promising salvation from the end of the world.

Tales of mass suicide began to emerge last month. Since then the grim toll has become clearer.

Clasping Samuel's shirt to his face, as if to breathe in a memory of him, Mwiti, 45, explained that his wife had been pregnant when she left home with the children several months ago. She had given birth to another son in the forest.

"Some survivors told me that my wife was allowed to breastfeed

him for one day only," he said. "After that they closed his eyes, a hand was placed over his mouth and nose, he was suffocated. Everyone clapped and celebrated. The son I never met was going straight to heaven."

Kenyan police said yesterday that they had recovered 201 bodies, many of them children, from shallow graves in the Shakahola forest. Several dozen people were rescued. But with more than 500 people associated with the cult still missing, the final toll is expected to be much greater.

Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, 50, a taxi driver turned evangelist pastor, moved to the forest in 2019. His followers were allotted areas with biblical names such as Judea, Sidon and Tyre. He told



Stephen Mwiti lost his family

them the "rapture" was coming – and that the world would end on April 15 this year. He allegedly ordered them to starve themselves and their infants to death so that they could escape the apocalypse and "meet Jesus in heaven".

Under this plan, a mass suicide was planned in phases beginning in March, according to Titus Katana, an ex-member and deputy pastor in the cult who offered a chilling version of events matching Mwiti's, in which some of the victims were suffocated or buried alive.

The first to starve were the children. "They were shut in huts for five days without food or water," Katana told

me in the forest. "Then they wrapped them in blankets and buried them, even the ones still breathing."

The women were supposed to be next, then the men. "The pastor and his family would be the last to go," said Katana, who is helping police with their investigation.

While Mackenzie's followers lived in makeshift homes of polythene sheeting, the leader's house had a thatched roof, furniture, television and a tiled bathroom. He showed little interest in fasting: "He had plenty of food: rice, milk, beans, maize, soya, porridge."

Katana had left the cult months before. "The pastor's teaching had become strange, he spoke of things I do not believe," he said. His wife and six children had remained in

the forest, however, until he returned earlier this year, braving "scouts" armed with clubs and machetes to rescue them as the fatal fasting began. "My family were very happy to be taken away from there," he said, without elaborating.

Matted with dense knots of impenetrable, thorny bush, the cult's forest hideaway spans some 800 acres near the Sabaki river – just down the road from Kenya's Tsavo national game park, a big tourist attraction.

The case has evoked comparisons with the mass killing 45 years ago of more than 900 followers of the "Reverend" Jim Jones, who drank cyanide-laced fruit punch at gunpoint in their cult's compound

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Nursing union chief in U-turn over pay deal

Patients face the threat of more strikes after a new demand for 'double-digit' increase

Caroline Wheeler Political Editor

The nursing union leader is demanding a double-digit pay rise for the profession in a U-turn from her previous position.

Pat Cullen, general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), had called for her members to accept the government's offer of 5 per cent. However, they rejected the deal by 54 per cent to 46 per cent and are preparing a ballot on whether to strike again.

In an exclusive interview with The Sunday Times, Cullen has called on Stephen Barclay, the health secretary, to reopen negotiations and said the talks need to "start off in double figures".

This weekend, she will tell her members that she underestimated them. Speaking on the eve of the annual RCN congress in Brighton, she said: "My message to them is just how proud I am of them and of their courage. They are the most courageous people ... Looking back on this pay offer, I may personally have underestimated the members and their sheer determination. And I think what I would be saying to the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, is: 'Don't make that same mistake, don't underestimate them!'"

Cullen praised their "selflessness" for refusing the deal and losing pay on strike days to "stand up

for the NHS", which she claimed was "sailing dangerously closely to the wind".

She added: "Nurses believe it's their duty and their responsibility because this government is not listening to them on how to bring it back from the brink and the message to the prime minister is that they are absolutely not going to blink first in these negotiations."

The RCN originally pushed for a 19 per cent pay rise. The government offered 5 per cent for 2023-24 plus a one-off payment of at least £1,655. The negotiations covered two financial years and resulted in a consolidated increase of 9 per cent. The offer was accepted by 14 unions, but not the RCN.

Asked why nurses deserved more than other healthcare and public sector workers who have accepted the offer, Cullen said: "It's not so long ago since the prime minister went on the media and very publicly said nurses are an exception. And I would totally agree with him ... They should be made an exception because they are exceptional people."

She called for fresh negotiations to "finish the job off" and avert months of strikes. "They [ministers] owe that to nursing staff not to push them to have to do another six months of industrial action right up to Christmas," she said.

"It's just not right for the profes-

sion. It's not right for patients. But whose responsibility is it to resolve it? It is this government."

RCN members have held a series of strikes over the past six months alongside other health unions. NHS figures show they have led to the cancellation of more than 500,000 appointments and operations. The union's previous six-month mandate to hold strikes ended on May 1. The new ballot for strike action will open on May 23 and close a month later.

Speaking at her office in Cavendish Square, in central London, Cullen, who has been a nurse for 40 years, said that going on strike was one of the "hardest decisions" she has made.

She said her members felt the same, adding: "On the morning of strike action, I wake up early to hundreds of messages from nurses telling me they're heartbroken; heartbroken to have to do it; heartbroken that it has come to this."

She said: "It's a total privilege to be a nurse. We do what no one else can do ... To be with an individual when they enter this world, but also to be with them when they're leaving. And so any talk from government, or other people, that this is about being reckless, or nurses turning their back on patients, or not doing the decent thing for patients, or walking away, is so far

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WALES, DOUZE POINTS



The Princess of Wales joins the Eurovision party, playing the piano for a film that introduced the song contest last night. Liverpool, recognised by Guinness World Records as the capital of pop, was hosting the competition on behalf of last year's winners, Ukraine. Big screens throughout the city showed all the action, including the UK's real entry, Mae Muller. Cocktails and cheesy pop legends, page 3

William 'wants a different coronation from King'

Roya Nikkiah Royal Editor

The Prince of Wales wants his coronation to "look and feel different" from the King's – and one notable absence will be a "homage of the people".

At Charles's service last weekend, the Archbishop of Canterbury invited the congregation at Westminster Abbey and all those following around the world to swear their allegiance to the King and his

"heirs and successors", a decision that prompted controversy. A source close to Prince William said: "There is no way he will go down that route or anything like it."

Those close to William, 40, said he has been "reflecting" on the events of last week, and considering how to "evolve" the ancient service. He is keen for his coronation to be "modern" and "relevant".

A royal source said: "He is really

thinking – how do we make his coronation feel most relevant in the future? He is mindful of the fact that in 20 years' time, or whenever his time comes, how can the coronation be modern but also unifying to the nation and the Commonwealth? I think his coronation will look and feel quite different."

The source added: "Are courtiers sitting at Kensington Palace coming up with a grand plan about what the next Bridge will look like?

No. [London Bridge was the code-name for Queen Elizabeth II's death].

"But of course the prince and his team are reflective about the events of last week and it is extremely important to him that it evolves to be relevant whenever it happens."

@RoyaNikkiah

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Camilla Long, page 27

NEWMAN'S VIEW



Residents must drive to sorting offices to collect their own mail – and send alerts if they spot a postie

Louise Eccles
Consumer Affairs Editor

At the Royal Mail sorting office in Bromley, southeast London, on Friday residents were queuing to collect stacks of letters after daily deliveries fell to once a fortnight.

Julie Reeves, 63, drives three miles from Catford to collect her mail every few days with her husband, who is in his eighties. On Friday, she collected 14 letters, including a bill for her Next shopping account. "We have been getting letter deliveries once a

week since July," she said. "We used to have a regular postie who delivered by 9.30am every day. This month, I haven't seen a Royal Mail van on our road for ten days."

Royal Mail is required by law to deliver letters six days a week, excluding bank holidays, to all postcodes for the same price, but Bromley is only one of a number of areas where residents are reporting unreliable deliveries.

Last week at the Bromley collection point, an 85-year-old man was collecting a pile of at least 15 letters after not receiving a

single item of mail for "quite a few days". "The postman came this morning but said he was only delivering parcels," he said.

Royal Mail is grappling with staff shortages, financial losses and industrial disputes over changes to working practices.

The company recently asked the government if it could end Saturday letter deliveries due to declining volumes but the idea was rejected, with the Department for Business and Trade saying "there needs to be a strong case to demonstrate these

changes will meet the needs of the UK public".

Despite this, some residents say a six-day service appears to have ceased in their area and report missing hospital letters, important bills, fixed-penalty notices and driving licences. "We are all doing our own postal service," said Michelle, 54, as she queued for half a dozen letters. "We get parcels delivered mostly, but not the letters."

Last week, it was announced that Royal Mail's chief executive, Simon Thompson, would leave in

October after finally agreeing a new deal on pay and conditions with striking staff. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) – which represents 115,000 out of 140,000 postal workers – said Thompson was one of the main people responsible for

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On TV, ST's best places

The Sunday Times's guide to which places in Britain are the best to call home will star in a Channel 5 documentary tonight at 5.35pm. Hosted by Fern Britton, the presenters visit ten locations to talk to residents and experience life in the area. This year's best place to live was the village of Wadhurst, East Sussex.

Helen Davies, editor of The Sunday Times Best Places to Live 2023, said: "The Sunday Times has built up Best Places to Live to become the definitive guide celebrating the very best of Britain's towns, villages and cities. It's exciting to see it come alive on screen."

AWARD WIN

Tom Calver, The Sunday Times's Data Editor, has won the Harold Wincott Award for Data Journalism of the Year.

At a ceremony at Mansion House in central London last Tuesday, judges praised Calver for "producing a crisp combination of data and words covering benefits, pensions and nurses' pay. A model of the genre."

Ministers may be recalled to blood inquiry in battle over £10bn payout

Campaigners fear the government is dragging its feet on compensation. A victim of the scandal dies every four days

Caroline Wheeler Political Editor

The chairman of the infected blood inquiry is considering whether to reconvene the hearings to compel ministers to give fresh evidence on their proposals to compensate victims.

The scandal is the worst treatment disaster in NHS history. Sufferers were infected after being given factor VIII blood products contaminated with HIV and hepatitis C, which were imported from the US in the 1970s and 1980s, or after being exposed to tainted blood through transfusions or after childbirth.

Sir Brian Langstaff is understood to be considering the request made by core participants in the inquiry, which finished in February. They have asked him to resurrect the hearings and call ministers to account for their actions.

Since the inquiry finished, it was assumed that no further evidence would be submitted, and that Langstaff, 75, a former judge, would deliver his findings in the autumn. However, campaigners, including those representing the Tainted Blood group, want to see Jeremy Quin, the Cabinet Office minister, and possibly Sue Gray, the former senior civil servant who previously worked on the inquiry, give further evidence. They believe the government may be "dragging out" the compensation process.

According to a story in the Financial Times last week, the compensation bill could be between £5 billion and £10 billion. "People are very worried about the cost," a government adviser said. It follows concerns that the government has reneged on its commitment to publish a response to the inquiry's compensation

proposals before the conclusion later this year. It is feared this will lead to a delay in the final payout to victims, who are dying at the rate of one every four days.

Figures published by the inquiry estimate that 1,350 people were infected with HIV, of whom more than 1,000 had died by the end of 2019. About 26,800 people are estimated to have contracted hepatitis C, of whom 1,820 had died from causes related to the disease by 2019.

The government has made interim payments of about £400 million to those infected and their bereaved partners. However, last month Langstaff said the interim payments should be extended to "recognise deaths to date unrecognised", including the parents and children who suffered bereavements.

In his second interim report, he said action was "necessary to alleviate immediate suffering". A scheme should be set up this year to compensate those both infected and affected; the latter group includes spouses, parents of children infected up to the age of 18, siblings who lived with an infected person, carers and dependants of the deceased, he said.

In response, Quin told MPs last month that the government would act at "pace" to "deliver resolution", but said that Langstaff's recommendations would have financial implications.

Kate Burt, the chief executive of The Haemophilia Society, said: "It is shameful that the government is dragging out the compensation process, even after the infected blood inquiry has recommended that payments be made as soon as possible. This delay and lack of transparency is causing great stress and anxiety to people who have already suffered too much. We hope the inquiry will use its powers to call ministers to account and shed much-needed light on what's happening behind closed doors."

A government spokesman said: "Any decisions on the running of the inquiry are rightly for its chairman Sir Brian Langstaff and we will of course respond to any future requests."

GREGORY BULL/AP



Women waiting at the border wall between Mexico and the US city of San Diego are given clothes by volunteers

Migrants massed at the US border think twice before crossing

Keiran Southern Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Each morning, shortly before 9am, Rosy Hernandez sits outside her tent in a dusty street in Ciudad Juarez and says a prayer as she tries to secure a coveted appointment with US Border Patrol.

Like tens of thousands of other migrants, the 32-year-old Venezuelan logs into a mobile app set up by US Customs and Border Protection hoping to score one of the 1,000 interview slots to seek asylum across the bridge in El Paso, Texas. The former x-ray technician has been disappointed. A month in, there is no end in sight for her stay on Mexico's northern border.

Hernandez is one of an

estimated 60,000 migrants massed on the 2,000-mile US-Mexico frontier, stuck in limbo following the end of Title 42, a Trump-era pandemic policy that allowed for the swift expulsion of would-be asylum seekers.

The law expired on Thursday and in its place are tough rules making many migrants think twice before attempting an illegal crossing.

Anyone captured could face a five-year ban on re-entry and potential criminal prosecution, with the White House issuing a series of stern warnings that the border is not open.

Those threats appear to have prevented an expected surge following the expiration of Title 42. A surprise sense of calm has fallen on many towns and cities along the

border, at least for now. On Friday night the streets of Ciudad Juarez were largely empty of migrants near the border, a stark difference compared with recent weeks.

Hernandez, who lives with her boyfriend in a small tent in a migrant camp in sight of US soil, has few possessions but plenty of time. Like many others she is prepared to wait in Mexico for many more months to reach America through the front door.

She has sacrificed too much to try an illegal crossing and risk being barred from the US for years.

Asked why she felt she had no choice but to flee her home and seek a better life in America, Hernandez was clear. "Comunismo," she said.

More than seven million Venezuelans have fled since

2015, escaping the economic and political chaos of the hard-left president Nicolas Maduro.

President Biden's response to the border crisis has drawn fire from all sides, helping to keep down his already low approval ratings as he embarks on a campaign to win a second term.

Republicans have accused him of operating an open border, allowing the drug fentanyl – and criminals – to flood into America. From the left, some Democrats have said Biden's policies are too similar to Trump's.

On Friday, human rights groups filed a lawsuit challenging the new rule tightening the qualifying conditions for asylum. It said "a humanitarian disaster" was unfolding at the border.

I'm devastated, says suspended Sentamu

Nicholas Hellen and Kaya Burgess

Lord Sentamu, the former Archbishop of York, has been suspended after a Church of England report found he failed to act on child abuse allegations against a priest.

Sentamu has stepped back from his role as an honorary assistant bishop and as an active priest "until both the findings and his response can be explored further", said a Newcastle diocese statement.

The Bishop of Newcastle's decision to suspend him was

supported by Stephen Cottrell, who took over from Sentamu in 2020 as the church's second most senior cleric. A report published last week found that Sentamu had failed to take action after the Rev Matthew Ineson informed him in 2013 that as a teenager boy he had been abused in the 1980s by the Rev Trevor Devamanikkam, who took his own life in 2017 the day before he was due to appear in court on sexual abuse charges.

Sentamu, 73, spoke of his shock, saying: "They have

besmirched my name and I have been made a public example. Those who believe that suspension is a neutral act, its effect on me is more devastating than they will ever imagine."

He suggested the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, had bowed to external pressure by making his suspension public before she had heard his side. Speaking while on holiday overseas, Sentamu said he had been advised that it was the responsibility of the Bishop of Sheffield to act on

such allegations. He said the report misunderstood the powers and responsibilities of diocesan bishops and archbishops and had overlooked the conclusions of previous investigations. He said he was not resorting to technicalities: "I followed the way of Christ in wisdom."

Ineson, who has waived his anonymity, welcomed the suspension. "It should have happened a long time ago," he said. Sentamu had "refused to apologise" and "now criticises the reviewer for not getting it right".



RCN boss U-turns on pay demands

→ Continued from page 1 service failures and "a financial crisis" that threatened the company.

In July to September last year, Royal Mail delivered 73 per cent of first-class mail the next working day. The target is 93 per cent. It delivered 91 per cent of second-class mail within three days. That target is 98 per cent. It completed 89.8 per cent of delivery routes daily. The target is 99.9 per cent.

In a report in March, the parliamentary business committee said it believed "Royal Mail has deprioritised delivery of letters as a matter of company policy". This was despite Thompson telling the

business of coordinating strikes. Patient safety is at the core and at the centre of everything that we do and we will do nothing that will add further risk to the patients that we look after.

"However, the truth is that patient safety cannot be guaranteed on any day of the week. How could you guarantee patient safety when you have 47,000 nurses missing from your workforce every single day and night?"

She said the staffing crisis in the NHS was of great concern. She said higher pay would bring back nurses who had left because of long shifts and harrowing work.

A health department source said: "Pat Cullen helped negotiate the pay deal and recommended it to her members when she made it clear that the government had made it clear there was no more money available and this was a full and final offer. This remains the case. It is strange how quickly the RCN leader has changed her tune from recommending this pay deal, which she now refers to as an insult to nurses."

Apology over land that Royal Mail forgot

committee it was "absolutely not true" that the company prioritised parcels.

When a postal worker is seen walking down Durham Road, Bromley, members of the street's WhatsApp group rush to alert one another.

"Hey, I've just seen a postman!" wrote Lisa Peer, 53, a legal secretary, last week. "At last!" replied a neighbour.

Royal Mail said it was not asking the public to collect their mail. In Bromley, the sorting office is dealing with high sick leave. Staff say managers are not recruiting, which Royal Mail denies.

The company has said that up to 6,000 redundancies may be required nationally by the end of August.

A spokesman apologised to customers and said: "We have a dedicated plan to improve the Bromley area's service quality. This has already reduced absence levels by more than half, with all current sick absences covered through temporary recruitment."

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TIMES RADIO

10.05am The energy secretary, Grant Shapps
10.35am The shadow business secretary, Jonathan Reynolds
12.45pm Kate's Confessional: the former UK ambassador to the US Kim Darroch shares his career highs and lows

2.15pm The teenage filmmaker Noah Caplan on his short feature *Stepping Stone*, starring Danny Dyer
6.35pm Sam McAlister on being played by Billie Piper in the Netflix adaptation of *Scoops*, her account of fixing the Prince Andrew interview

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WFH City bosses told: Your staff are back in the office – so you should be too

Jill Treanor City Editor

It is a new phenomenon causing problems in offices around Britain.

Many experienced managers are working from home, often in large houses with a garden, but less experienced staff, who may live in shared flats with no space for a desk, are coming to the office.

Now one of Britain's biggest companies, M&G, has told its top managers to spend three days a week at work to maximise "the value of spending time together".

The investment manager joins the army of employers who are calling time on workers who are reluctant to

get back to the office. The insurance giant Aviva has told its managers their bonuses will be linked to getting more staff into the office. Lloyds Banking Group has asked the 40,000 or so staff who would usually have office-based jobs to come in for at least two days a week.

M&G said its junior staff want to see more of their "leadership team in the office than is currently the case". Senior executives have been given two months' notice.

The lockdowns prompted a debate about the future of the office and many employers adopted hybrid working, a mix of home and office work. But many employers report that more

junior staff have been keen to work in person with their managers now that the pandemic has faded.

Andrea Rossi, M&G's new chief executive, has said to staff recently that he does not want to end the hybrid working model. But, in an email signed by him and his executive team, seen by The Sunday Times, "office-based leaders" are being asked to spend on average three days a week "together with your team and key stakeholders" between Monday to Friday and on rotating days each week. This would appear to rule out the so-called "twat" routine – being in the office on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays – adopted by



many workers. An Italian-Swede, Rossi, 56, who is paid a basic salary of £875,000, joined M&G in October with a mandate to inject growth into the business, which employs about 6,000 people in London, Edinburgh, Bath and elsewhere.

In the email, managers were told getting back to the office more regularly was "an important step in setting our business up for growth and for building a truly great place to work".

It continued: "We've all seen the advantages working remotely can offer us – and it's important we continue to benefit from these and work flexibly to balance the demands of office and home

life. Equally, we must succeed as a business – and for that to happen, it's essential to make the most of the talent and experience we have at M&G by supporting career development and maximising the value of spending time together."

It said the company needed to put itself in the best possible position to deliver on our strategic priorities.

"A big part of that is about spending more time with our colleagues, clients, customers and stakeholders. That's the next step in unlocking the benefits of a simpler operating model and making M&G a faster, more agile and collaborative place to work

that's easy for our clients to do business with."

Some employers have been more draconian. The investment bank JP Morgan has told its managers to get back to their desks five days a week, while AO World, the electrical goods retailer, banned hybrid working at the start of the year.

Last week its chief executive, John Roberts, said staff should resign if they did not like the decision.

"The production levels of those people working here who don't want to be in the office are much lower," he told The Times.

"Everyone almost breathes a sigh of relief when they leave."

'Graham Norty' cocktails, bingo and Jedward: it's Eurovision time

Cheesy pop legends kicked off the parties in Liverpool on the night that taste forgot

Liam Kelly Arts Correspondent

It wasn't the Fab Four reforming, it was the Nul Points Two – but the reception that greeted Jemini in Liverpool on Friday night was still deafening.

The Scouse duo, Chris Cromby and Gemma Abbey, are best known for being the first UK act to fail to score a single Eurovision point when their song *Cry Baby* flopped at the song contest in 2003. They broke up the following year and have not played since.

For the hundreds of devoted Eurovision fans that mattered not a jot, and they cheered to the rafters. "I don't know if you know this song," Cromby said sheepishly into the microphone. "But it went down in history." The crowd sang along to every word and, such has been the reception, that the pair have decided to record music again.

Welcome to Liverpool, a city coming down from two weeks of solid partying culminating in the Eurovision grand final. The world's biggest TV extravaganza took over Merseyside and it was almost impossible to escape.

Streets and bars featured a Who's Who of cheesy pop music legends. On Friday night, inevitably dubbed "Euro eve", Katrina Leskanich – frontwoman of Britain's last winner, Katrina and the Waves – opened a boozy Bongo's Bingo night by singing as sequin-clad punters danced on the tables. She asked if anyone could remember her victory with *Love Shine a Light* in 1997. "I can barely remember it myself. I was told I couldn't win because of the political voting so I decided to get shitfaced." After a rousing version of her other hit, *Walking on Sunshine*, she declared: "This is a city that knows how to dance and I love it!"

It has been an intergenerational event. Closing the festivities at the bingo hall, three-quarters of 1981 winners Bucks Fizz – now known simply as the Fizz for legal reasons – were mobbed by fans who were not even born when they triumphed with *Making Your Mind Up*.

Conchita Wurst, the Austrian "bearded lady" who triumphed in 2014, gave regal waves to the crowds as he was escorted to the arena, while Sophie Ellis-Bextor held a kitchen disco party among the pots and pans in the John Lewis show kitchen.

Bars have been selling "Graham Norty" cocktails – a mix of tequila, triple sec, curacao and orange juice – in homage to the BBC's commentator.

While some contestants have opted for early bedtimes in preparation, Moldova's



Mimicat performing Portugal's entry in Liverpool last night. Below: Eurovision partygoers at the Euroclub

Pasha Parfeni has been spotted most nights drinking with fans at the Euroclub, as have German goth rockers Lord of the Lost. After being eliminated during the semi-finals, Azerbaijani duo TuralTur-anX and the drummer from Ireland's Wild Youth went out drinking and dancing with fans enjoying a set by two-time entrants Jedward.

Tens of thousands packed into the fan village next to the Liver Building to watch live coverage of the first two semi-finals – which until this year had never even been shown live on BBC1 because of a perceived lack of interest.

The crowd was littered with pink bucket hats (the signature of last year's winners, Kalush Orchestra) and T-shirts bearing the words "Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe" (a nod to Austria's Edgar Allan Poe-inspired song). Five Swiss sat there each night marking their own homemade scorecards to judge the live performances for themselves.

Everyone in the city is constantly reminded of the fact that Liverpool is only hosting this year because Ukraine could not. The

official colour scheme is blue and yellow, with the colours splashed everywhere from the walls of shops and stalls that usually sell Liverpool FC merchandise, to Albert Dock, where the Beatles' yellow submarine has been painted blue. Ukrainian artists have installed huge nightingales – the country's national bird – across the city, displacing Merseyside's liver bird as its most conspicuous ornithological presence.

"It's Ukraine's party, it isn't ours," said Christine Fletcher, 65, who handles insurance claims. "Liverpool has been a city of adversity, like under Thatcher, and people don't realise we are the way we are because of adversity. So we will always support anyone who's in trouble."

Even the city's university plonked a karaoke booth near the docks and urged potential students to "Release your inner diva, grab the mic and get the Eurovision party started".

Often sneered at in the UK by those who reckon the songs are naff and the performances unspeakable, enthusiasm for Eurovision was given a shot in the arm last year when Essex boy Sam Ryder's falsetto *Space Man* came second. Since then, membership of Britain's official Eurovision fan club has more than trebled to 7,000 people.

Vaughan Staples, a social worker who is the club's president, said: "You send a decent song and a decent act and you do well. You can't use the excuse of politics or everyone hates us. There has always been a huge Eurovision community ready to be unleashed. It's a way for people not into sport to get into something competitive."

Perhaps predictably, the Eurovision melting pot threw up some unusual international alliances. Ivana Hákstad travelled from Stavanger in Norway with her friend, Kristina Andreassen, for their tenth Eurovision. Despite their homeland's participation with Alessandra's popular entry *Queen of Kings*, they spent the week dressed in the green shoulder pads of Finland's Käärijä. "It is a better song," said Hákstad, 44, a nurse. "Liverpool has been the best Eurovision we have seen. It is so well prepared and the variety and diversity is amazing."

Even those who don't care for the spectacle have reasons to be cheerful. "I hate it, it's really not my bag. The traffic is terrible," said Thomas Michael, 29, an Uber driver. "I don't mind the money, though."

"Hook", a Ukrainian officer near Bakhmut, said he did not have time to watch live, but would "definitely" watch the highlights later. Pavlo Lagoida, an anti-aircraft gunner, said that he has been a Eurovision fan since 2016. Ukraine taking part in Eurovision is "proof that no war can break us," he added.



Results, thetimes.co.uk

To be or not to be confused? What it's like playing Richard Burton playing Hamlet

Liam Kelly Arts Correspondent

The ghost of Richard Burton has long stalked the actor Johnny Flynn.

When he was a child, he had recordings of Burton reading Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* and "would often fall asleep to him reading me TS Eliot".

So perhaps it was inevitable that Flynn would eventually play Burton on stage. The actor has earned rave reviews for his star turn playing the Welshman in *The Motive and the Cue*, a new play at the National Theatre charting the tumultuous rehearsals before Burton's record-breaking run as Hamlet on Broadway in 1964.

The work, written by Jack Thorne and directed by Sam Mendes, flits between the

rehearsal room and a luxurious hotel suite where Burton's new wife Elizabeth Taylor, played at the National by Tuppence Middleton, is trapped by baying crowds of paparazzi outside. The rehearsals fizz with tension as Burton and the director, Sir John Gielgud, clashed over the Danish prince's motivations and threatened to unravel the production before it even began.

Playing as iconic a figure as Burton would intimidate any actor. Flynn, 40, has spent much of the past two years watching the many interviews that Burton gave, rather than his films, to get a sense of who he was and how he should play him.

"He's being himself, and I know from film-making you're really limited in what you share of yourself because you're really trying to tell that

story in that moment," said Flynn. "He was really honest, talking about his drinking and all sorts." The key to playing a character like Burton is not to try to mimic the famous figure. "My attitude towards playing real people is, firstly, not to beat myself up about it because you can get overwrought about it," said Flynn. "I'm an actor, not an impersonator, and I don't want it to be an impersonation. I want it to be a real living thing. The impersonator works from the outside, whereas the first port of call for me is to find the soul of him."

One challenge for Flynn was capturing the arrogant Burton's animus with Gielgud, who is played by *Sherlock* star Mark Gatiss, and also playing Burton playing Hamlet. There is even a point in which Flynn's Burton



Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, who is being played on stage by Johnny Flynn, right



impersonates Gielgud playing Hamlet.

Flynn has something of Burton's rugged good looks. Faded scars on his face are a reminder of an attack by a Staffordshire bull terrier when he was three.

Born in Johannesburg and the product of his actor father Eric's third marriage, Flynn's family is full of performers. His older half-brothers are actors Jerome, best known as one half of Robson and Jerome, and Daniel, while his sister Lillie sings in his band.

Flynn first found fame as a folk singer and fronts Johnny Flynn & The Sussex Wit, has released five albums and toured with the likes of Mumford & Sons and Laura Marling.

"I'm quite restless and it's nice to do different things," said Flynn.

Burton is not the first real-

life role Flynn has played. He starred as David Bowie in the 2020 biopic *Stardust*, and has done turns as Albert Einstein and Ian Fleming. Later this year, he will star in *Ripley*, Netflix's new series based on Patricia Highsmith's book *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Flynn plays Dickie Greenleaf, the role made famous by Jude Law in the 1999 film adaptation.

One way the Burton play differs from Flynn's experiences is its portrayal of dysfunctional rehearsals, but there are moments that ring true. "I have been in places where there's a friction and a building frustration on one side or the other of a director and leading actor. Conflict can be good in a creative environment," he said. "I don't think Burton's a bad person."

@iamliamkelly

‘In the forest of death, I saw starved cult members’

→ Continued from page 1

in Guyana. Some of the bodies that forensic teams in white coveralls exhumed in the Kenyan forest had their hands tied with wire, prompting speculation they may have rebelled. Others had organs missing, according to a senior police source who suspected the involvement of a kidney-trafficking ring.

Mackenzie was arrested last month with his third wife and several close collaborators. He remains under investigation for numerous crimes including assisting suicide and murder. The month before he had been arrested briefly and then released. He previously came to the attention of the authorities in 2015 after banning followers from sending their children to school or to hospital when they were ill. He called both institutions “satanic”.

The pastor’s acolytes were encouraged to sell all their belongings and buy land from him to live in the forest. He has denied forcing anyone to starve or trying to defraud followers.

His own children, meanwhile, appeared to have been kept far from harm’s way.

I met one of them, Michael Paul Mackenzie, 20, at the cult’s former headquarters in Malindi, a 90-minute drive from the forest of death. A lanky, soft spoken

figure wearing shorts, three shirts and black flip flops, he called Mackenzie an “honest father” who had been misunderstood. If his followers had starved themselves to death, it was their fault, he said, adding: “They made their choice – the children too.”

He had wanted to become a pastor like his father but added, casually, that he, too, would probably begin starving himself to death next month. “The end is near,” he said. Pulling out his mobile phone, he added: “This is the evil thing – everyone is putting their faith in technology and not God.”

He then led me into a cavernous, derelict hall. Crows pecked at the ground. Painted on one wall at the front of the building were the words: “Taking gospel to the world.” In a corner lay the giant fragments of a parabolic antenna: this was where Mackenzie used to gather thousands of followers for his “end of days” preaching, also broadcast on television and over the internet.

He founded his Good News International Church in 2003, one of thousands of American-inspired evangelist groups to have sprung up all over Africa in the past two decades. William Ruto, the Kenyan president, is himself an evangelist.

Outside the Malindi hospital, people



REUTERS

milled about on Thursday waiting for news of missing loved ones and, like iron filings to a magnet, clustered around an ambulance when it arrived to deliver two of the latest forest starvation victims.

I followed them in, watching as Peter, 26, was lifted into a wheelchair, severely weakened after fasting for over a week. “I was a sinner and wanted to be born again,” he whispered when I asked him why he had stopped eating. An unpleasant smell filled the room, perhaps because of his punctured left foot – he had stepped on a sharp tree root in the forest. “It’s badly infected, probably gangrenous,” said Stanisha Pwani, the doctor examining him.

In a room next door, five other cult members were recovering on stretchers and plastic chairs. “I wanted to see Jesus,” said Nicolas, 24 who had lived with his wife in the forest but says he does not know where she is.

Near by a severely malnourished woman sat on a mattress. She seemed confused, mumbling repeatedly, “They gave me some food.”

Job Oguto, head of the emergency department, said that Some patients had at first wanted to refuse treatment but were given nutritional supplements.

It had been heart-breaking to see children close to death from starvation. “They didn’t understand what was happening,” he said. Down the corridor, Nelson Baya, a 50-year-old plumber, told me he had joined Mackenzie’s church years ago but revolted when the pastor had started forbidding people from sending their children to school and barring women from braiding their hair. “For me education is everything,” he said.

He was unable to extract his eldest son Michael, 26, from the pastor’s clutches – the boy, a skilled pianist who had played in the church services, had tried to starve himself to death and was recovering in the men’s hospital ward.

The whereabouts of his wife, Sidi, and sons, David, 3, and Abel, 2, is unknown. “When I asked my son what had happened to them, he started crying,” said Baya. “Either he knows, or he doesn’t,” he added. “But I don’t want to blame him.”

When his son’s family had visited him in Malindi in March all seemed well. “He told me he was farming and I was happy for him,” said Baya with a rueful smile. “Little did I know there was something they were not telling me.”

He went on: “The question I keep on asking myself is how this madness could have been going on for over a year without the government knowing about it.”

Ruto, the president, has ordered a commission to investigate the tragedy.

Mwiti is also outraged. “Mackenzie should have been stopped long ago,” he said. He recalled how he would find his wife, a seamstress, watching “the church TV” every day when he came home from selling fried bread in the street. “She kept saying ‘the world is coming to an end’ and he [Mackenzie] will take me to heaven’.”

He cannot imagine a future without his family. “My main goal in life was to educate my children,” he said. “Even if they kill Mackenzie or detain him for 100 years it won’t bring them back. I don’t see any point now in living.”

Paul Nthenge Mackenzie, top, left, is being investigated for a string of crimes. Above, a survivor receives treatment

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Johnson ‘will cut a deal on parties to remain as MP’

Caroline Wheeler and Tim Shipman

Boris Johnson’s allies expect him to cut a deal with the privileges committee that will result in him being suspended from parliament for less than 10 days – below the threshold that would trigger a career-ending recall petition.

Although the former prime minister has had no formal contact from the committee, it is understood that, to avoid a harsher penalty and the prospect of a damaging by-election, he will accept a finding that he misled the Commons.

Allies say he will accept the committee’s verdict as long as he can “find a form of words” that make it clear he did not deliberately mislead MPs about the parties at No 10. A source said: “The main goal is to ensure he can remain as an MP.”

MPs on the privileges committee, which has a Conservative majority, are investigating whether Johnson recklessly or intentionally misled parliament. The committee hinted during its questioning of Johnson in March that it was moving towards a finding that he recklessly, rather than deliberately, misled parliament.

It is understood that Johnson is expecting the committee to recommend a suspension of about four days. According to sources, he recently discovered that Owen Paterson, then a Conservative MP, had been offered a similar deal when the standards committee

investigated him for breaches of the lobbying rules.

The former North Shropshire MP rejected it, refusing to accept he had been at fault, and eventually faced a 30-day suspension after the committee found him guilty of “egregious” breaches of ethics rules. He had repeatedly used his position as an MP to make promises to two companies which paid him a combined income of £112,000 a year.

A source familiar with the case said: “Johnson has been told not to make the same mistake as Paterson. If he had just accepted the slap on the wrist and the deal he was first offered he would still be an MP.”

If the privileges committee finds Johnson guilty of misleading MPs, it can recommend a sanction, which can include a written apology, docking of salary or suspension from the Commons for a specific period. This would have to be confirmed by a vote of MPs. A suspension of more than ten days allows the Speaker of the House to order a recall petition, which can lead to a by-election.

Although Johnson stood down as prime minister more than 10 months ago, it is understood that his resignation honours list will not be published until after the conclusion of the investigation. Sources claim that it has been held up because the Lords appointments commission has decided MPs nominated for peerages by Johnson cannot delay accepting them in order to avoid by-elections.

William plans to do coronation ‘his way’ – no homage needed

A week after his father’s ceremony, the Prince of Wales is aiming for a more ‘modern and relevant’ service

ROYA
NIKKHAH



Royal Editor

The Prince of Wales has made it clear he does not “lie awake at night waiting or hoping” to be king. But with his father’s coronation now recorded in the history books, Prince William is thinking ahead to the day he is crowned.

He wants it to “look and feel different”, so it is more “modern” and “relevant”.

William, 40, has started thinking about how to “evolve” the ancient ceremony when he succeeds his father, after playing a key role in last week’s proceedings.

Unlike the King, William will not include a “homage of the people” in his coronation. At Charles’s service on May 6, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, invited the congregation at Westminster Abbey and those following the service around the world, to swear their allegiance to the King, his “heirs and successors”, a decision which sparked widespread controversy.

A source close to William said: “There is no way he will go down that route or anything like it.”

William, 40, who paid a poignant “homage of the blood” to Charles, 74, during the coronation, kneeling before his father and swearing to be his “liege man of life and limb”, has been carefully “reflecting” on the events of last week with his closest friends and advisers.

A source close to the prince said: “He is really thinking, how do we make his coronation feel most relevant in the future? He is mindful of the fact that in 20 years’ time, or whenever his time comes, how can the coronation be modern but also unifying to the nation and the Commonwealth? I think his coronation will look and feel quite different.” The source added: “Are courtiers sitting at Kensington Palace coming up with a grand plan about what the next Bridge will look like [London Bridge was the codeword for the late Queen’s death, and Forth Bridge for Prince Philip]? No.

“But of course the prince and his team are reflective about the events of last

week and it is extremely important to him that it evolves to be relevant whenever it happens.”

It is understood that, contrary to some reports, William was not closely consulted on the planning for Charles’s coronation. The prince, who will be known as King William V, is thought to be committed to being crowned at Westminster Abbey, where every British monarch’s coronation has been held since William the Conqueror’s in 1066.

But those close to him point to his decision not to have an investiture as Prince of Wales as an indicator of how William will continue to break with tradition as heir to the throne. In July 1969, Charles had a coronet placed on his head by his mother in a ceremony at Caernarfon Castle in north Wales that looked medieval in parts.

The event was watched by an estimated global audience of 500 million, but prompted political controversy from Welsh nationalists.

The coronation service for the King and Queen last week included several breaks with tradition since Elizabeth II’s service in 1953, which lasted more than three hours. Charles and Camilla’s two-hour, multilingual ceremony featured female bishops and leaders of other faiths for the first time, and was widely seen as the most inclusive, diverse coronation in history. The King and Queen also scaled back their guest list, with 2,300 people at the abbey rather than the 8,000 who attended the late Queen’s.

Another source close to William said: “He’s taking stock, he’s thinking ‘that was a supreme success and it was because Pa altered things. I’ve got to be cognisant of how that evolution happens in my day. What is it that stays? What do I need to change? What will our relationships with the realms and the Commonwealth be then?’ I don’t think he’ll be taking the filleting knife to it, but he will be checking it is sharp.”

A source close to William said he was focused on the issue of “relevance”. The source said: “You can see it in how he has taken having an investiture off the table, and his thinking on how to leave a legacy in communities rather than just going in [to] do ribbon cutting. You can see it in how he is running an environmental prize with Earthshot that is not just about handing cash out, but about

LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES



The Prince and Princess of Wales with Louis last weekend. William is understood to be keen to modernise the monarchy

the long-term impact globally. He is thinking about his coronation in the same way.”

In an interview with the BBC to mark Queen Elizabeth’s 90th birthday in 2016, William said: “I certainly don’t lie awake at night waiting or hoping” to be King, but admitted he was preoccupied with how to modernise the monarchy.

“It occupies a lot of my thinking space as to how on earth you’d develop into

something modern in today’s world. I think the royal family has to modernise and develop as it goes along, and it has to stay relevant. That’s the challenge for me, how do I make the royal family relevant in the next 20 years’ time?”

William is understood to be particularly keen to keep young people engaged in the work of the monarchy, which is likely to be increasingly challenging.

A YouGov poll last month found that

most young people did not care about the coronation. In a survey of more than 3,000 adults, 75 per cent of people aged between 18 and 24 said they did not care “very much” or “at all” about the coronation, with 69 per cent of those aged between 25 and 49 saying the same.

@RoyaNikkhah

Adam Wagner, page 25
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Lionel Richie and his partner Lisa Parigi with the King at a palace garden party to mark the coronation

Art gallery or VIP guesthouse – what next for unloved Buckingham Palace?

Liam Kelly
Arts Correspondent

To many, it is the ultimate symbol of the royal family. To the King, however, it is a palace in which he never wants to live, nor even particularly likes.

For years he has let it be known, indirectly, that he has no intention of living in the 775-room Buckingham Palace and instead wants to throw open its doors more widely and more often.

Traditionally, its state rooms and gardens have been open to the public for only ten weeks a year, from July to October, when the late Queen was at Balmoral.

As the King is showing little intention of leaving Clarence House, there has been speculation that Buckingham Palace could be turned into a museum or gallery that doubles as “monarchy HQ”. Since 2002, Clarence House – next to St James’s Palace and a short walk from Buckingham Palace – has been Charles’s London home.

Both the King and the Prince of Wales are said to agree that Buckingham Palace is not suitable for modern family life.

Opening up to the public its 19 state rooms, 240 bedrooms, 78 bathrooms and 92 offices would raise the prospect of many more people being able to see one of the most exquisite art collections in the world, with masterpieces by Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian and Vermeer.

The Belgian Suite, where foreign heads of state often stay, is where Princes Andrew and Edward were born and is decorated with paintings by Canaletto and Gainsborough. Overnight, it could become an elite global museum.

“He likes it at Clarence House, is quite frugal and wouldn’t want to get an interior designer in to redo Buckingham Palace for him,” said a source who knows the King well. “People who come to Britain on state visits

240

Number of bedrooms in the palace

expect to stay at Buckingham Palace, so it could become a gallery and presidents’ guesthouse. It is such a cavernous place that you could fit things in so that nobody noticed each other.”

The source added: “The Royal Collection is one of the world’s great private art collections and it would be a fantastic way to have it be seen more widely.”

Simon Thurley, a former chief executive of English Heritage and now chairman of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is an architectural historian with expertise in palaces. “I would absolutely anticipate it being open more under the King,” he said. “It is pretty well set up, it has a good shop and the Queen’s Gallery is excellent. It is a case of weaving opening hours around what has to happen there.”

That will be the biggest obstacle to Buckingham Palace becoming a full-time tourist attraction – its use as the setting for diplomatic receptions, charitable events and investitures means it will often have to turn people away. To prepare for a big function it must go into a security lockdown all that day. If a last-minute event

were planned, a lot of visitors’ tickets would have to be refunded.

The palace is six years into a decade-long, £369 million taxpayer-funded refurbishment. Ministers say the building needs an “urgent overhaul” to prevent the risk of fire, flood and damage because the electrics, plumbing and heating have not been updated since the 1950s.

But a government source said there was little appetite in Whitehall for another national museum to add to the National Gallery, Tate and the British Museum because of the cost. “We have got plenty of museums already,” said the source.

Change is also expected in the palace’s 42-acre gardens, the largest private garden in London, under the King. He is said to have “big plans” for the grounds of Buckingham Palace and the Sandringham estate in Norfolk.

A palace spokesman said: “It is expected that the necessary works will be completed for their majesties to take up residence in 2027. In the interim period, the palace will be fully utilised for official business wherever practicable.”

It’s Huw Edwards the Proms pied piper

Liam Kelly

When he was 14, Huw Edwards entered a music competition in Llanelli, south Wales, determined to impress the judges with his piano recital of Beethoven’s Sonata 19 in G Minor.

He was beaten to the prize by a more precocious performer. The face of BBC News said the episode “taught me a hell of a lesson” and joked that it had left him “bitter for life”. Edwards, 61, continued to play and will share his love of classical music more widely this summer when he hosts two BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall. The first, on July 23, will feature Beethoven’s Symphony No 9. The second, on August 6, includes Mozart’s Mass in C Minor.


Edwards said that when he was growing up his father, Hywel, an academic, had a pile of Beethoven LPs. Edwards began on the piano aged about eight, before playing the organ in local chapels.


He now lives in London and regularly played at Welsh churches in the capital before lockdowns forced services to migrate to Zoom.

Edwards, who is paid up to £415,000 by the BBC, is also a vice-president of the National Churches Trust, a charity that helps maintain and preserve places of worship. He has been vocal about the need to protect pipe organs when churches and chapels close. “The situation is grim. So many excellent instruments have been lost already,” he said.

The Proms, tickets for which go on sale today, will feel familiar to devoted viewers of the BBC’s news bulletins. As well as Edwards’s two Proms, the season gets under way with performances fronted by Clive Myrie, while the Europe editor, Katya Adler, is making her debut and presenting works from the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

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Braverman faces divide in cabinet as figures show net migration may hit one million

Ministers are drawing up plans to restrict visas for dependants of overseas students and considering new rules on minimum salaries

CAROLINE WHEELER
Political Editor

The cabinet is divided over immigration policy as ministers brace themselves for migration to reach a record. Forecasts have suggested that the net figure for last year, to be published this month, could be as high as a million.

To see off a feared backlash from MPs and the wider party, ministers are drawing up plans to stop family members from joining overseas master's students at British universities. The number coming under that provision has risen more than tenfold in four years, from 12,806 in 2018 to 135,788 in the year to December.

However, some feel they need to go further and are arguing for a rise in the salary threshold for immigrants. Skilled workers are eligible for visas if the job pays £26,200 – 20 per cent below the median salary of £33,280.

One cabinet minister said: "The salary threshold in the points-based system is too low. I would advocate raising the salary threshold to a level that more accurately reflects high-skilled work than the present £26,000. But the dependants reform is the most advanced and with the broadest agreement in government."

A former cabinet minister accused the government of "tinkering around the



Suella Braverman is under pressure from Channel crossings by migrants

edges" and failing to take robust action to bring down net migration.

Much of Rishi Sunak's focus since becoming prime minister has been on illegal immigration, in particular "stopping the small boats", which he has made one of his five core missions.

It is understood, however, that Suella Braverman, the home secretary, and Robert Jenrick, the immigration minister, raised concerns at cabinet about the levels of legal migration.

A source said: "They were aligned in their concerns at the levels being seen, which appear to show that the present levels are more sustained than just being

boosted by those coming into the country from Ukraine and Hong Kong, with very high levels of work, student, and student-dependant visas being issued."

The Conservatives promised at the 2019 general election that "overall numbers will come down" but data due from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on May 25 is expected instead to show that net migration hit a record last year.

"People will be very shocked by how big the net numbers will be," admitted a government insider.

Between June 2021 and June last year, net migration hit a record 504,000, according to ONS data, but the Centre for

Policy Studies forecasts that net migration could be between 700,000 and 997,000 for the year to December.

In the autumn Braverman attempted to revive a Conservative pledge to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands despite the failure of successive governments to hit the same target. The home secretary said she would aspire to cut the overall figure amid a clamour from party activists to take control of immigration levels.

She said: "I think we have got to definitely substantially reduce the number of students, the number of work visas and in particular the number of dependants on those sorts of visas."

In the year to December, visas were issued to 490,000 students and 136,000 dependants, 260,000 workers and 155,000 dependants, and 58,000 migrants from Hong Kong and 200,000 from the Ukraine.

This weekend it appeared Braverman's mission was likely to be knocked off course amid claims that Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, and Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, had watered down the immigration crackdown on foreign students after pointing out the economic harm it would inflict.

The Home Office was considering a wider clampdown on international students bringing dependants with them, after official figures showed some brought in six last year.

A government source said: "The Home Office wanted a hard stop on families to respond to net numbers coming out this



month." According to sources the reason for targeting master's students is that the courses are shorter. "The primary interest is limiting dependants on non-research courses so as not to harm universities' ability to source students for PhDs where the case for dependants is stronger."

A cabinet minister said there was a strong argument against tougher restrictions when more than half a million people, including many in their fifties and sixties, had left the labour market. "There is a shortage of workers and these jobs are being filled by immigrants. If that doesn't happen there will be a negative effect on the economy," they said. "These are not people coming in because of freedom of movement. These are people coming here from around the world to fill our job vacancies."

Conservative MPs have complained to Simon Hart, the chief whip, about Braverman and her competence. Senior backbenchers have raised concerns about her tone and style. Some requested that she not be deployed to campaign in their constituencies.

At a meeting between Hart and Brexit-eer MPs last week, one grandee complained about Sunak's five pledges and raised concerns that he may miss all of them. A source said: "After that it was open season on Suella Braverman and everyone was attacking her small boats bill. Many think it's undeliverable and ... it will just be another example of the party lying to voters."

Sunak remains focused on small boats. This weekend, he pledged to secure as many barges as it takes to house migrants to face down a revolt from the party's right wing. He also pledged to hold twice-weekly cross-governmental meetings to tackle the crisis, modelled on the way No10 dealt with the pandemic.

He told The Mail on Sunday: "It's not fair to British taxpayers shouldering the burden of illegal asylum seekers being housed in hotels; it's not fair on those who come here legally and play by the rules for those rules to be broken by people who jump the queue; it's actually not fair on the people themselves because they are being exploited by criminal gangs and many of them are dying when they try and make these dangerous crossings."

"The number of illegal crossings last year was 45,000, that number has gone up four or five times in just a couple of years and it can't carry on like this."

A giant barge, the Bibby Stockholm, which can accommodate 500 migrants, arrived in Falmouth last week. It is understood that another will be stationed off the Wirral, and there is speculation that at least one more, possibly off Teeside, is in the pipeline.

Editorial, page 24

Bring Back Boris brigade wait for Godot by the seaside

CHARLOTTE IVERS

Don't call it a Bring Back Boris conference. They don't like it when you call it a Bring Back Boris conference.

A few hundred of us have gathered here on the Bournemouth seafront to talk about increasing the power members have in the Conservative Party. This is the launch event for the Conservative Democratic Organisation (CDO). Take Back Control is its aim. It is about democracy in the Conservative Party. Nothing to see here, guv.

As I am tucking into a limp BLT sandwich in the Bournemouth International Centre, I bump into Nadine Dorries, Boris Johnson's foremost cheerleader in parliament. "Apparently we're not allowed to call this a Bring Back Boris conference," I mutter conspiratorially. She laughs. "You might think differently once you've seen my speech."

Also speaking are Jacob Rees-Mogg and Priti Patel, loyal Johnson foot soldiers. Patel says of her colleagues in Westminster: "By making the changes they made last year [they] have turned their back on the membership." This is, let me once again stress, not a Bring Back Boris conference.

"What brings you here today?" I ask another MP who has shown up for the festivities. He looks cagey. "Can I tell you the real reason, or do you want the official reason?" This MP, it emerges, had bumped into the organiser in the pub after a boozy lunch. He had jovially agreed to speak, he tells me, hoping to "weasel out" afterwards. "And now I'm here," he laughs.

Boris Johnson, however, is not here. Nonetheless, he has signed some bottles of wine for the raffle. People keep telling me about the bottles of wine. Earlier, Andrea Jenkyns, resplendent in a glittering Union Jack fascinator, treated us to a rendition of the national anthem to open proceedings.



Johnson's supporters had to make do with a video

A trained opera singer, she is better known as the MP who gave her son the nickname Brexit. But none of this can make for the absence of the greatest showman of all.

Johnson's presence hangs over the conference centre like that of a much-missed ex-lover at a birthday party. An appeal for calm comes from – of all places – Jacob Rees-Mogg. "We must not change leader again," he tells the congregation. Next up on stage is Claire Bullivant, the organisation's chief executive. "I know Jacob said we don't want another leader, but I actually think if we did get Boris back in time for the next election ... " The rest is drowned out by applause.

"I don't know if he's coming today," Bullivant

continues. Later we will watch a video in which Johnson thanks members for "everything you did to help us to get Brexit done and to win the biggest majority our party has won for years". Meanwhile, here in Bournemouth, over floppy sandwiches and pints in plastic cups, we are waiting for Godot. Since Godot does not seem to be forthcoming, I wander outside. Paul Holmes, vice-chairman of the Conservative Party, looks nervous as he drags on a cigarette. "I have really enjoyed myself and I am here to listen," he tells the conference hall later.

Holmes is the sacrificial lamb, sent by Tory campaign headquarters in a gesture of goodwill. He wouldn't agree he has been "sent" and says as much in his speech. But the party wants denizens of this Bournemouth outpost to know it is listening to members' concerns. You won't find many fans of Rishi Sunak here.

Earlier the officers of the CDO were all elected to their posts by unanimous consent of the gathered members. There was one candidate for each position. The president is the Johnson cheerleader Lord Cruddas. The chairman is the Johnson cheerleader David Campbell Bannerman. The CDO wants to see a

democratically elected party chairman. It wants to be able to deselect MPs. It wants a bigger role for members in policy-making and the annual conference.

Jenkyns is concerned that "infant children are taught words like masturbation at school". On criminal justice she wants life to mean life. Rees-Mogg is annoyed about Brexit again. The chairman of the organisation's youth movement warns about "the rise of a new dangerous ideology – woke", adding ominously: "We are told that there are a hundred genders."

Outside, I keep bumping into Maxime Zimmermann, a driving instructor, and Gloria Boldy, retired. They both live in Bournemouth. Maxime has been toying with voting for the new Reform UK party. After the morning's speeches she feels ready to return to the fold. "I do think that if Boris became prime minister again, the people that have left would actually rejoin," she tells me.

I think I'm going to write that we aren't meant to say that this is a Bring Back Boris conference but I think it is, I tell the pair conspiratorially. Maxime agrees: "There were cheers in there when that was said." Gloria nods: "There were."

Gloria and Maxime are right. There were.

Rees-Mogg is annoyed about Brexit again



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Driven to distraction

Tim Shipman
Chief Political Commentator



Backseat drivers are dogging Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer — and Liz Truss has grabbed the wheel with a Taiwan trip

When Liz Truss lands in Taipei as a guest of its government this week it won't only be the Chinese watching with interest to see what she says. In London, Rishi Sunak and his team are engaged in a near-pathological effort to pretend they don't care. They very much do.

In a speech to a think tank on Wednesday, the former prime minister plans to describe the growing stand-off between China and Taiwan, and the West more broadly, as "the most consequential struggle of our time".

"She feels very strongly about this but didn't have time to shift the UK government position while she was prime minister," a source said. "There are some practical steps that could and should be taken to demonstrate our support for Taiwan and give them the assistance they require."

Aides say Truss is going to use another speech at a democracy summit this week in Copenhagen to advance an idea she began to discuss as foreign secretary for an "economic Nato" to balance Chinese global commercial influence.

But for a former prime minister to go to Taiwan, where no member of the cabinet – let alone the leader – has ever gone before, could inflame an already sensitive situation. When Nancy Pelosi, then the speaker of the US House of Representatives, went to Taiwan in August, China fired multiple missiles into surrounding waters and began a series of huge military drills around the island.

Truss is not the only former prime minister raising eyebrows. Theresa May staged a sit-in protest at the base of the

throne in the House of Lords last week, shaking her head as a minister defended the government's new immigration laws, which May believes undermine the legislation she fought for on modern slavery. Boris Johnson and John Major are frequent commenters (from opposing positions) on Brexit. And on Saturday Boris Johnson issued a provocative video message to grassroots Tories.

On the Labour side, Sir Tony Blair and his closest allies have given interviews that stop some way short of unequivocal praise for Sir Keir Starmer, while Gordon Brown is constantly offering advice.

Since Truss's resignation in October, there are now seven living former prime ministers, a record since Sir Robert Walpole became the first holder of the office in 1721. At no time in history, then, has British politics had so many backseat drivers. Margaret Thatcher was first to adopt the phrase in 1990 when John Major took her place. Saying farewell to Tory party workers she said: "I shan't be pulling the levers, but I shall be a very good backseat driver." If by "good" you mean wrenching the handbrake and constantly telling the driver he is going the wrong way. Thatcher, of course, had learned from one of the best disgruntled ex-leaders, Sir Ted Heath, dubbed "the Incredible Sulk" for his decades-long devotion to opposing her after she ousted him as Tory leader in 1975.

Truss's decision to jump on a plane to a place that is not a sovereign independent state, where Britain has an office but not full diplomatic relations, has created waves in Whitehall. Truss will not use her speech to call for full diplomatic relations, but sources admit this is "the direction of travel".

Until now, the response of the government has been to say it would not get involved in the "independent travel decisions of a private citizen who is not a member of the government". This weekend, however, a Foreign Office source said: "The government has had a policy on Taiwan which is longstanding and remained unchanged for the entire time Liz Truss was foreign secretary and prime minister."

Others in government are less willing to bite their tongue: "She seems to have waited until she was neither of those things before trying to change things."

A close ally of another ex-Tory prime minister said: "She seems to believe she is

indestructible, despite having actually been destroyed."

Some put this down to Truss's resilience and a lack of interest in being loved. "She's a political cockroach," said a semi-admiring former minister, "which does at least mean she will survive the nuclear war that she seems intent on starting."

Truss's spokesman hit back: "She's pushing things she believes which she thinks would be beneficial to the Conservative cause, frankly. There is a large measure of support among the party grassroots, who, let us not forget, did vote for her last year."

This is only the fifth time in British history that four prime ministers and ex-prime ministers have sat simultaneously in the Commons. The last time was in Thatcher's first term when Heath, Jim Callaghan and Harold Wilson were all still MPs. Sunak has the unfortunate distinction of being the first prime minister with three predecessors from his own party all in the Commons at the same time.

May is the one to whom Sunak talks the most. "They have quite regular conversations," a Downing Street source said. When Sunak began in No 10, David Cameron was also generous with his advice but, of all the Tory ex-premiers, he has tried hardest to keep his head down, having been stung by the Greensill affair, in which it emerged he had lobbied ministers on behalf of a company he was involved with. "Poor old Dave," a member of his old cabinet said. "Boris roams around like a bull elephant in a china shop smashing everything up and the first time he put his head above the parapet he made a prat of himself."

When Sunak attended the events marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday agreement, he was seen in friendly conversation with Johnson, Truss and Blair, though perhaps friendliest with Labour's triple election winner. "They had a nice chat and compared notes on prime minister's questions," a Tory source revealed. Did this chat extend to giving advice? "There was a bit of that, yes."

Such is the recent rhythm of events that Johnson may only be the third most problematic Tory ex-prime minister. He is somewhat becalmed as he awaits the ruling by the Commons privileges committee into whether he knowingly or recklessly misled MPs about the party-gate scandal when he was prime minister.

Johnson believes he will be presented with a ban from the Commons of less than ten days, which would mean he would not face a recall ballot in his constituency that could end his political career.

His resignation honours have been stalled until after the committee's ruling, expected in the next two to three weeks. Insiders say that the hold-up has been caused because the House of Lords Appointments Commission has rejected the idea that sitting MPs can take peerages and defer them. There are thought to be four on the list.

Johnson's relative caution comes from the fact that, unlike Truss and May, he has not given up hope of returning to No 10. Close allies still believe this is not impossible before the general election, expected in the autumn of next year, and perhaps even likely after it.

Few Tory MPs think Johnson would enjoy the role of leader of the opposition, a far more thankless task than being prime minister. But it is also one where it is what you say, rather than what you do, which gives it impact – something that might suit Johnson if Starmer forms a minority or coalition government.

Allies licensed to speak on Johnson's behalf say he is keeping his head down and point out he did not attend the Conservative Democratic Organisation's conference this weekend. The grassroots group set up by Lord Cruddas is seen by some as a front for the "Bring back Boris" campaign. However, Johnson did send a video thanking activists for "campaigning against unnecessarily high taxation", a coded dig at Sunak. Allies want him to be treated with more respect by Sunak: "There could be more outreach. That will be a test of their political judgment."

Looming over Starmer are the living ghosts of Blair and Brown, both of whom are given to rattling their chains semi-regularly. Blair has given interviews praising Starmer's success in getting Labour to look electable but urged him to stamp out "complacency". Privately, some of his closest allies have urged Starmer's team not to fall into the trap of playing it safe trying to win the election.

Some of these comments are not just a nuisance; they can be weaponised by political opponents. Prime minister's questions regularly features either Sunak or Starmer quoting unhelpful things that past politicians on their own side have said. Last Wednesday Sunak quoted Blair

as saying: "The right honourable gentleman can be as cocky as he likes about the local elections; come a general election, policy counts." What he didn't say was that this was a comment Blair made in 2007 about Cameron. He failed to add the next bit – "On policy, we win and he loses" – perhaps because Blair's party lost in 2010.

Senior Labour officials say Starmer is getting "too much unsolicited advice" and has been advised he "should change his mobile number soon". One said: "People are popping up from 20 years ago telling him what they think." But it is stressed that the insights of both Blair and Brown are welcome and both would be given Starmer's new number.

"Tony has his own set-up and that means he can pronounce a lot," a Labour insider said. "He tends to push very Blairite issues like technology and modernity." Brown "wants to be involved in big projects". Starmer aides attest to Brown's habit of calling the leader and others with his thoughts. "He's a force of nature, a blunderbuss," said one, nearly politely.

The Cameron, May, Johnson and Truss premierships were all cut short by political miscalculation, which means they are still (relatively) young. While Major is 80 and Blair and Brown in their seventies, May is 66, Johnson 58, Cameron 56 and Truss only 47. The old route of taking a seat in the Lords no longer seems popular since it comes with an obligation to declare business interests. Major made millions as an adviser to the Carlyle Group, while Blair ran a series of interlocking companies to provide political advice to world leaders. The most recent register of members' interests shows Johnson has pocketed about £5.2 million from speaking gigs and £560,000 from book advances and royalties since he left Downing Street. He still enjoys £13,500 a month of accommodation provided by the Bamfords, despite buying a new home in Oxfordshire.

Theresa May received £559,000 for speaking gigs in 2022, using the money to "pay employees, maintain my ongoing involvement in public life and support my charitable work". Since September 2020 she has paid herself an annual salary for speaking of £85,000 a year, doubling her MP's income.

By the end of March, Truss had registered £72,000 of speaking fees. She may well double that by the end of this week.

“
May
shook
her head,
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a sit-in
protest

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Truss
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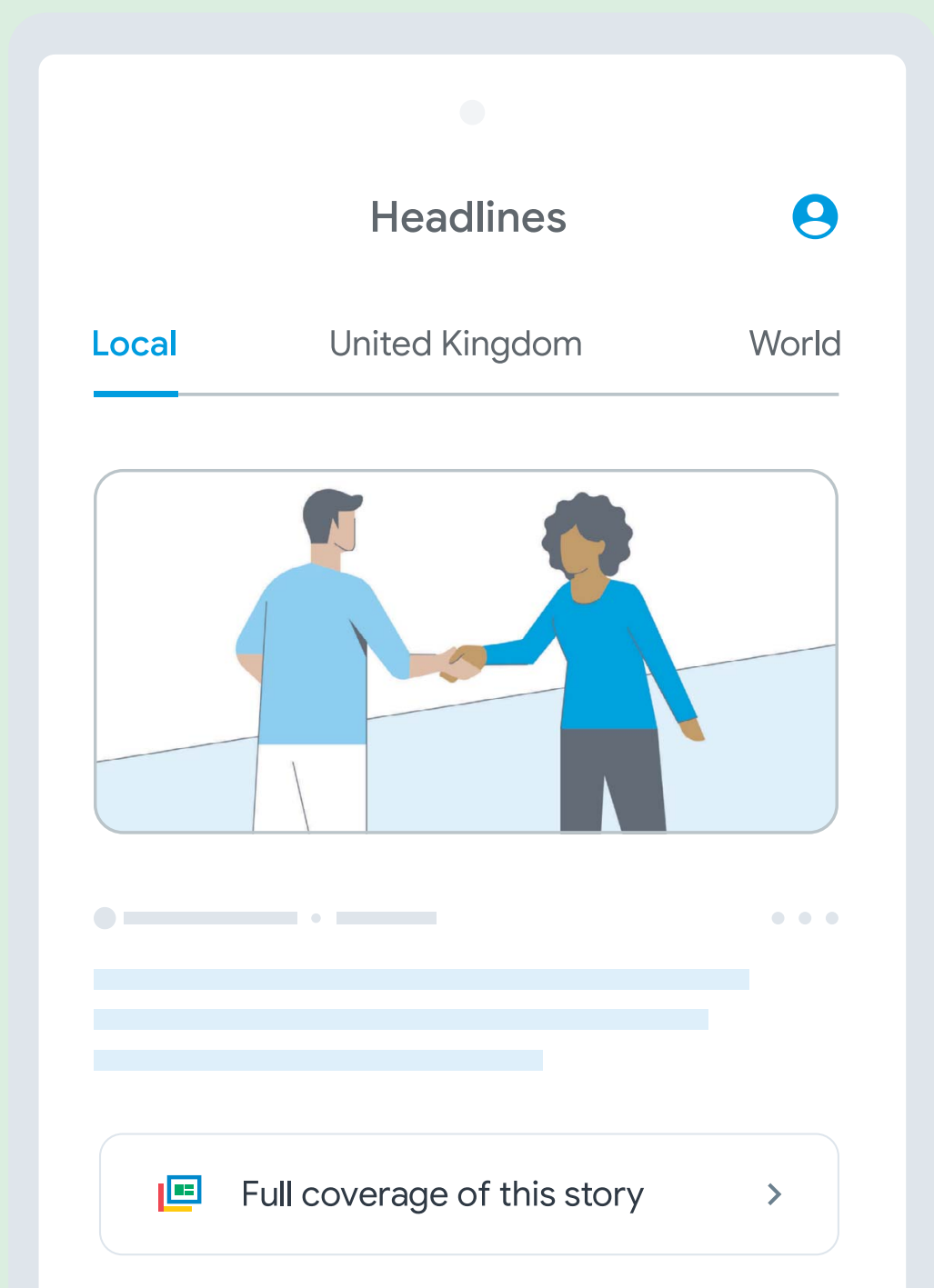
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I watched the pastor wrestle teens at Soul Survivor Christian concerts

David Gate, an ex-worshipper at a church whose leader is accused of inappropriate behaviour, reveals what he witnessed

The first time I encountered Mike Pilavachi was in 1992 when I was around 12. My religious parents and I attended a Christian camping festival in the Bath & West showground. Mike was leading the youth group. Immediately I was impressed by him. He was engaging and fun – he didn’t treat us like kids. He was in his thirties at the time and very vocal about leading a life of celibacy.

Mike went on to found Soul Survivor in Watford in 1993. I’d travel there for monthly worship celebrations they held in schools. In 1996, when I was 16, I met Mike for the first time. He singled me out and told me I was going to do amazing things for God. I felt chosen.

The following year, Soul Survivor put out an album of Christian worship songs. I was an aspiring songwriter and submitted songs for it – two were picked. My parents couldn’t have been prouder of me. It was exhilarating. I started to lead worship at events. I joined the “inner circle” of people close to Mike.

He liked play-wrestling. Sometimes I’d wrestle with him before events, sometimes it would be backstage, but always fully clothed in the company of others. He did that a lot with young men. It was a sign that he liked you – you were one of “Mike’s boys”.

There seemed to always be a favourite – usually athletic, always male teenagers or young men – no older than 23. If he’d win – and often he was a lot bigger than us – he might sit on top of you. Looking back, it must have appeared strange, a 45-year-old, well-built man wrestling on the floor with a 16-year-old boy.

At Soul Survivor festivals, everyone would know who I was and would sing my songs. One year, Mike singled me out and interviewed me. It was overwhelming, encouraging and uplifting.

Soon after that, I started to experience his toxic behaviour. Mike hated it when musicians spoke to the congregation – he wanted to be the only person with a direct relationship to them. When I first

started, I’d encourage people to clap, or raise their hands, share a Bible verse or introduce a song. This was absolutely not allowed. I was repeatedly reprimanded for any attempt to communicate publicly. Mike always wanted control.

Off stage, he often ignored me. I would sometimes call and email him, but wouldn’t hear anything for months. Then, finally, he’d invite me out for coffee and it was like nothing had happened. I would be welcomed back into the “inner circle”. Then the cycle would repeat.

I questioned everything about myself. It was one extreme or the other. There was a culture of forced humility within the church: always be humble.

A pattern of hurt emerged early on when it came to the young men who Mike would single out. It was not a secret. Young men were being picked up then discarded year after year. Like me, they would leave feeling like it was them who had messed up.

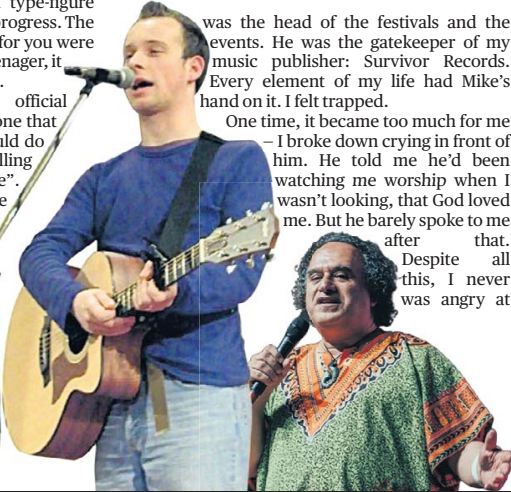
Mike had the power to break your career. I felt like I was permanently in a state of being on *The X Factor*. I was being judged by a Simon Cowell type-figure about whether I was able to progress. The only doors that would open for you were the ones he opened. For a teenager, it was emotionally devastating.

At first there weren’t official interns. There was just the one that was closest to him, and would do the majority of the travelling with him. The “favourite”. They would rotate even more quickly as the years went on. Always boys or young men, white, middle-class, athletic, impressionable kids.

There seemed to be no one who Mike was accountable to. The realm of power he had over my life was huge. He was the pastor of my church. He



David Gate, left, says Mike Pilavachi had the power to break artists’ careers



was the head of the festivals and the events. He was the gatekeeper of my music publisher: Survivor Records. Every element of my life had Mike’s hand on it. I felt trapped.

One time, it became too much for me – I broke down crying in front of him. He told me he’d been watching me worship when I wasn’t looking, that God loved me. But he barely spoke to me after that.

Despite all this, I never was angry at

Mike. I thought it was my fault. I know 12 men who had these experiences. I imagine there are many more.

We used to joke that when you got married, Mike would drop you. I started dating my wife when I was 20 – we met through Soul Survivor. Not long after we married, we moved to Northern Ireland.

In 2012, after I had moved to America, I heard things had developed into more than just emotional manipulation. It had turned physical. I found out Mike had massaged one of his interns at his house, using oils. Afterwards, that person had been dropped just like I had. The individual didn’t want to come forward.

My final experience was in 2017 when I was visiting the UK. The church, which was packed, was in the middle of a sermon series on sex. Mike preached that men couldn’t have relationships with other men because they had too much lust. He said that women had lower sex drives, which moderated a man’s libido. It was misogynistic and homophobic.

Later we were told to break into groups of five or six to talk about sex: adults with teenagers. Most of us were strangers. There was no safeguarding. That was the final straw. I never went back.

For more than 20 years, I have asked myself how much Mike was conscious of what he was doing. I think he knows the damage he does. I don’t think of him as a monster. I also remember him as genuine and fun. But he has positioned himself at the head of a church where young people end up infatuated with his celebrity.

He has now stepped back from the church and there is an investigation by the Church of England. But I have little faith in the process. The report does not have to be published. Victims are being told to report to the investigation and not speak out. I am disappointed that there has been no statement from Justin Welby.

This isn’t only about Mike Pilavachi any more. This is about the church taking accountability.

As told to Katie Gatens

CHURCH INQUIRY UNDER WAY

Mike Pilavachi, 65, stepped down as senior pastor on April 2. Lambeth Palace was supportive of Soul Survivor, and allowed it a degree of autonomy, such as setting its own safeguarding measures.

The Church of England said: “The investigation [into Pilavachi] is being run by safeguarding professionals from the national safeguarding team and diocese of St Albans. We would urge anyone with any information to come forward and can assure that they will be treated with the utmost sensitivity. For obvious confidentiality reasons people have come forward but do not want their experience in the public domain, while others do. Our job is to ensure they are heard and responded to.”

The Sunday Times was unable to contact Pilavachi, but asked Soul Survivor to pass our questions on to him.

● Paul Martin, who founded the US branch of Soul Survivor, spoke out this weekend, saying he “had to”, having brought Pilavachi to the US “countless times” between 1999 and 2007. “I put Mike on a stage in front of thousands upon thousands upon thousands of young people over the course of eight years,” he told The Daily Telegraph.



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INVESTIGATION



The low-cost e-bikes that became killer fireballs

Faulty batteries sold online are causing blazes when they are put on charge. The vehicles spark fires every two days

By Nicholas Hellen and Emanuele Midolo

On New Year's Day, Sofia Duarte was asleep when a modified electric bike in her flat exploded into flames.

Faulty e-bikes and e-scooters have caused a fire in the capital every two days since the start of the year. Last September, Abdul Jabar Oryakhel, from Afghanistan, died falling from the top floor of a Bristol tower block after an e-bike started a blaze.

The London Fire Brigade says it has had to attend 158 e-bike and e-scooter fires since the start of last year. Across the UK, they have injured at least 190 people and killed eight since 2020.

In January, Gary Shearer, 23, tried to save his father Rab, 60, from a house in Merseyside from a blaze started when an

e-bike battery that had been charging caught fire. Both men died.

Part of the problem is the ease with which cheap, potentially dangerous e-bike batteries can be obtained. The internet is full of such items for as little as £175, which often have had no safety checks. They can be a risk if they are over-charged or short-circuit.

Duarte, 21, had returned home late from a night shift. While her five flat-mates jumped from the second-floor flat's windows to the street, she was disorientated and tried to escape down the staircase. A family friend, Alda Simoes, 45, said: "Sofia was confused and instead of going through the window she went through the door."

Weeping, she added: "The fire brigade were there within a couple of minutes but there was nothing they could do. The

bikes were at the entrance. Some of the neighbours were trying to break down the door because they knew Sofia was inside but they couldn't go past the fire. She was there for I don't know how long."

Footage from a passer-by shows fireballs exploding from a window, while bystanders in the Old Kent Road, south London, scream. The last message Sofia sent from her phone was to her mother, Maria Frasquilho Macarro, at six minutes past midnight. It said, "Happy new year mummy" along with a heart emoji.

Last month, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service issued a video of an e-bike exploding in a house. It warned: "The fire can be ferocious and keep reigniting. Burning battery vapours are toxic, can spread quickly and cut off escape routes."

E-bikes have soared in popularity, particularly among workers in the gig economy who use them for food delivery jobs, and lower-paid workers who use them for commuting. About 160,000 e-bikes were sold in the UK in the past year, and 2.2 million in Germany.

Now there are concerns that the government and landlords are not taking

Sofia Duarte died in her flat in south London after by a faulty e-bike started a fire

158

Number of e-bike or e-scooter fires in London since the start of last year

seriously the risk posed by faulty e-bike batteries, usually imported from Asia and sold cheaply online.

The electric motor on an electric bike or e-bike assists with pedalling. It takes its power from a rechargeable battery on the bike, which typically contains lithium-ion cells and is charged from a normal socket. The bikes are legally restricted to a top speed of 15.5mph, but many riders tamper with them to boost speeds to 25mph and more.

An electric bike from a leading brand can cost between £1,000 and £3,000, or a regular bike can be adapted using a kit costing from around £400. These meet high safety standards. But that is not true of many batteries available online.

There is particular concern about the charging of e-bikes in blocks of flats and in shared homes, where they are often plugged in in hallways, which means they block exits if there is a fire.

A spate of blazes and deaths has increased concerns that not enough is being done to ensure that batteries used on e-bikes are safe. Following 200 fires in a year in New York, landlords have begun

banning e-bikes from being charged in properties. New national safety standards have also been imposed.

The London Fire Brigade has been speaking to companies such as Just Eat, Deliveroo and Uber Eats about the risk to delivery riders, who may modify their bikes and store them in their bedrooms.

The University of Cambridge has prohibited e-bikes and e-scooters from being charged or kept indoors, unless in a designated store. Its guidance to students says: "When the battery cell heats up and ruptures, it releases a highly toxic and flammable vapour cloud. This is swiftly followed by ignition in the form of intense directional flames. Due to the chemical composition of the batteries, they produce their own oxygen and heat, making them almost impossible to extinguish, even with professional fire-fighting equipment and techniques."

Last week, Salix Homes, a housing association in Salford which rents out 8,500 homes, issued a warning following a fire started by a charging e-bike battery which destroyed the tenth floor of a tower block it owns. It advised residents





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never to charge batteries at night or at home, to ensure they meet UK safety standards, to beware of online kits, and always to unplug them once charged.

However, neither the trade bodies for insurers or for landlords have issued guidance about the storage and charging of e-bikes in properties nationwide.

E-scooters have either been banned, or will be banned from June 1, by a number of train firms.

Will Butler-Adams, chief executive of Britain’s biggest bike manufacturer, Brompton Bicycle, believes there is a failure of regulation and consumer protection. He said: “We are not going to ban electric cars, even though they contain exactly the same cells, and that’s because they are properly regulated.”

Phillip Darnton, chairman of the Bicycle Association, an industry body, approached Jesse Norman, a transport minister, in November. “We can’t let the opportunity for e-bikes be blown off course by the import of substandard products and people tampering and meddling. There is only one issue. How does this stuff get stopped?” he said. The government is due to publish guidelines on lithium batteries shortly.

In February, the charity Electrical Safety First spotted an advertisement for a 48v e-bike charger, listed on Facebook Marketplace for £16, to be collected in the East Dulwich and Peckham area of south-east London.

It had a clover leaf plug without a fuse in it, which meant if the cable short-circuited, it could burst into flames. Martyn Allen, technical director of the charity, alerted Meta, the parent company of the site, to this and nine other dangerous products. Meta did not remove them. Instead it said it would act only on “valid legal requests”.

It was only after the charity alerted the Office for Product Safety and Standards, which in turn asked Meta to de-list the items, that the adverts were removed some time after April 24 – having been on sale for 39 weeks in total, and 55 days after it was alerted to the danger.

By contrast, Amazon Marketplace, eBay, wish.com and AliExpress all responded swiftly when alerted that they had dangerous goods for sale.

Oliver Montague, founder of Swytch, a British-based firm which has sold 29,000 kits to convert conventional pedal bikes into e-bikes, at a cost of around £500 each, says none of his products have been implicated in a fire, but that the market is being flooded with unregulated imports. He said: “There is nothing to stop someone importing a battery that is

not fit for purpose into the UK. They could put it in a shipping container, get it through the port, into the warehouse and then through any number of shippers to a customer.”

The government says it has increased checks of lithium batteries at ports and borders. A spokesman said it would take enforcement action if it found unsafe products.

Christine Heemskerk, the lead officer for product safety at the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) said: “It’s a broken system.” A quarter of a century since the rise of online shopping, product safety laws which apply to bricks and mortar still do not apply to the internet, meaning it can be hard to hold sellers responsible for faulty goods.

Last month, Kevin Hollinrake, a business minister, told a roundtable attended

“
I cry over my daughter every day. My heart is broken. It’s too much

by Amazon, eBay, Etsy and Alibaba that they had to do more to keep unsafe products off their platforms. The government is due to publish a product safety review, including policy proposals for online marketplaces.

Paul Miloskeski-Read, the lead officer for e-commerce at the CTSI, said online platforms were not required to check the product in advance, but need only intervene if they were made aware of problems.

He pointed out that the number of trading standards officers, based at around 200 local authorities, had been halved in the past decade and was so under-funded that he “would not be surprised if 90 per cent of services do not have the resources or funding to conduct routine test purchases of products such as e-bike chargers”.

Sofia’s mother Macarro wants to the government to put in more regulation to avert another tragedy.

She said: “It’s too much. I think about her when I wake up, before I sleep. I cry every day in my job, at home. It’s not easy. My heart is broken.”

THE STONE ROSIES

NICK BULL/PICTUREXCLUSIVE



Stonehenge was cast in a pinkish haze as the sun set over the 5,000-year-old Wiltshire monument. Sunny spells and rain are expected over much of the UK this week Weather, page 29

Young women bid their way back to the bridge table

Ellie McDonald

When Helen Erichsen was 30, her father made her an offer: he would take her on holiday to the Caribbean if he could teach her to play bridge.

“I thought he seriously had to be kidding me – bridge! That’s a game for older people,” Erichsen said. But her father, a keen player, was desperate for her to learn – and the promise of a holiday was too good to resist.

While she was away, she played every day and fell in love with the game. Now 55, Erichsen mentors young female players and has written a bridge-playing protagonist into her debut novel, *Murder by Natural Causes*.

She hopes the book, published next week, will do for bridge what the Netflix drama *The Queen’s Gambit* did for chess. The TV show, which starred Anya Taylor-Joy as a young female prodigy, attracted many more women to the game.

Erichsen is among a growing number of women taking an interest in the game, which was considered to be declining in popularity. Bridge was developed from a similar card game, whist, that originates from the 16th century. Bridge became popular between the 1930s and 1950s, and top players became minor celebrities.

It has since fallen out of fashion, but this appears to be changing: the English Bridge Union (EBU) has about 50,000 members, with 600 affiliated clubs. The England women’s under-26 team competes at international events.

While bridge is thought to be largely gender-equal at amateur level, competitions are male-dominated. The research project Bridge: A MindSport for All (Bamsa) at

Stirling University found that only two of the 50 highest-ranked bridge players in England in 2018 were women. There is only one female player in the top 50 on the English national grading system leaderboard.

Bamsa’s research findings led to the publication of a gender policy by the women’s committee of the European Bridge League last year, with the aim of providing equal opportunities.

Erichsen teaches bridge and mentors young female players aged 16-24. One of her students, Venetia Anoyrkatis, 16, became the youngest English player to win the prestigious national Lady Milne trophy last month. Anoyrkatis said: “I think it’s an amazing game for young people and I’ve made amazing friends from playing the game.”

Erichsen’s novel follows Cilla, 22, a bridge-playing contract killer who specialises in murders that look like death by natural causes.

“Instead of looking at the technical side, I decided to focus on the excitement of winning and losing – that is something everyone can relate to,” Erichsen said. “If this book causes more people to play bridge, I will die happy.”

For Erichsen, bridge even became a matchmaker: she met her husband of 21 years, the Norwegian professional player Espen Erichsen, at TGRs bridge club in London.

Helen Erichsen met her husband at a bridge club



Editorial, page 24

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Crime chief accused of using police against Labour foes

‘It’s tripe,’ says Tory who is alleged to have asked officers to investigate political rivals’ local election leaflets

David Collins Northern Editor

A Conservative police and crime commissioner has been accused of using his influence to push for separate police investigations into his political opponents ahead of the local elections.

Steve Turner, PCC for Cleveland, has been accused of triggering two investigations into his opponents ahead of the elections on May 4. He and his wife, Andrea, were both trying to win council seats in Redcar in the Tees Valley.

Turner made two complaints: the first about a Labour election leaflet in Tory blue colours, which he believed broke electoral rules, and a second about alleged harassment, which he reported

using the police 101 hotline. Labour activists said they felt “intimidated” when police visited three campaigners and questioned them over their election literature.

Turner called the allegations he triggered the investigations “complete tripe”. He said he simply reported the leaflet to the council’s monitoring officer, who decided to inform police.

“A resident sent a copy of the leaflet to my wife saying, ‘I think this is disgusting,’” Turner said. “At that point I didn’t know it was a Labour leaflet.”

Turner said the leaflet falsely alleged that he and his wife had broken selection rules. Turner’s wife was on the local party’s panel, which picked him as a candidate.

He said that a number of security measures have since been taken to protect him following what he calls a “toxic campaign” to uproot senior Tories in the region, including Ben Houchen, the Conservative mayor of Tees Valley. Turner claimed that a wave of “vitriol” on social media began in September 2021,



PCC Steve Turner and his wife, Andrea

when the Labour MP for Middlesbrough, Andy McDonald, used parliamentary privilege to claim that Turner had been sacked for stealing from a previous employer.

McDonald accused Turner of the “systematic theft of merchandise” from a Safeway supermarket. Parliamentary privilege allows MPs to make statements in the House of Commons without fear of being sued. “That was wrong,” Turner

said. “I made a mistake 24 years ago in 1999, when I was in my late twenties. I was handling stolen goods on behalf of somebody else. I took a police caution for that.” Turner went on to become an area manager for Sainsbury’s supermarkets.

For Labour, questions remain. Alec Brown, a Labour Redcar election agent, said that a week before polling day, fraud police arrived at his doorstep saying they were investigating campaign leaflets. “I did feel interrogated, slightly,” Brown told Sky News.

Labour activists believe a conflict of interest has occurred because Turner’s job as PCC means he oversees the officers who investigated his political opponents. Turner denies any undue influence or conflict of interest.

Cleveland Police said: “Routine enquiries were made to establish who had created and distributed the leaflet, and following a review of the circumstances it was concluded that no offence had been committed.”

@davidcollinsST

SAY CHEESE



A queen is crowned as the Gloucestershire village of Randwick, near Stroud, celebrates the wap — a spring festival with dancing and cheese-rolling that originated in medieval times and was revived in the 1970s by the local vicar

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AI can identify every tweet – from birds

Ben Spencer Science Editor

Growing up in Gloucestershire in the 1970s, Conrad Young could recognise the trill of a yellowhammer in nearby farmland. “We said their call sounded like ‘a little bit of bread and no chee-ee-ese’.”

It is a sound that few youngsters would know today. The yellowhammer lives in hedgerows and, in winter, feeds on seed and grain split during the autumn harvest. With many hedges replaced by fences, and modern combine harvesters spilling little seed, the population has declined by 61 per cent since 1967.

Many British farmland birds are suffering similar fates. Pesticides and herbicides have killed the insects and wildflowers they feed on, the switch from hay to silage has removed another food source, and improved field drainage has removed wetland habitats. It means many species we would assume to know – partridges, turtle doves, house sparrows and skylarks – are declining.

Young, 50, decided to do something about it. He

created Chirrup.ai – an artificial intelligence service that records the dawn chorus on a farm for two or three weeks and provides a list of the birds there. Identifying birds can also give an indication of the presence of insects on which they feed.

Chirrup.ai provides an alternative to a survey that would need an ecologist on site – labour-intensive and expensive. Small recording boxes are placed about the farm and the recordings are uploaded to a web-based AI programme, which produces a list of up to 140 bird species and an environmental report.

Sophie Alexander, 60, who manages a 1,200-acre farm in Dorset, is testing the service. She said her customers are increasingly demanding information about her crops’ environmental impact.

Alec Taylor, of the World Wide Fund for Nature, said: “Harnessing the power of technology has the potential to enable farmers to demonstrate impact when it comes to boosting nature.”

Take the dawn chorus quiz at [sundaytimes.co.uk](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk)

Pucker up: lip tattoos offer a perma-pout

Louise Eccles Consumer Affairs Editor

Touching up your lipstick could soon be a ritual of the past, as growing numbers of women are getting lip tattoos.

People are going to extreme lengths to ensure a smudge-free pout that can last between one and three years, with tiny needles used to prick the skin and insert pigment. It gradually fades depending on how deep the ink is inserted and how much it is exposed to the sun.

A basic version of lip-tattooing has been around for years. An autopsy after Michael Jackson’s death in 2009 found he had a pink tattoo lip-liner. However, improvements in techniques and technology have given rise to a more natural look known as “lip-blushing”. Rather than tattooing on a block of colour, the needle makes tiny brushstrokes to implant pigment in more neutral shades about 1mm below the skin’s surface.

Google searches for lip-blushing have increased fourfold since 2019, while the hashtag #lipblushing has received 177 million views on TikTok.

Eyebrow tattoos, often referred to as microblading, remain the most common cosmetic tattoo in the UK, while others opt for tattooed eyeliner, beauty spots, freckles and even along their hairline. Ruth Langsford, a presenter on the ITV show *This Morning*, is among the celebrities to have had eyeliner and eyebrow tattoos.

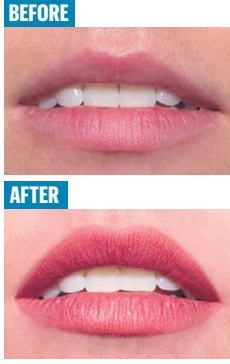
Tracie Giles, who runs a permanent make-up clinic in Knightsbridge, said half of the

treatments she carried out were now for lips, compared with a small number five years ago.

Giles, who explained that the process takes two hours, said: “The advanced artistry of lip-tattooing has shifted up a gear in the last three to four years. People want to give their lips more definition and symmetry, but keep it natural with a soft dusting of colour.”

However, lip-tattooing can cause the lips to swell and scab over, taking up to four weeks to heal. The British Association of Dermatologists said people should be aware that, although often referred to as “semi-permanent make-up”, it can be permanent if inserted beyond the superficial epidermal layer of skin. Dr Tamara Griffiths, of the association, warned that allergic reactions to pigment could occur and that breaks in the skin could introduce infection. The mild trauma can also sometimes trigger underlying skin conditions such as cold sores, vitiligo or psoriasis in those susceptible.

@louise.eccles



Will police start digging for missing Elizabeth 24 years on?

Killer Levi Bellfield has ‘confessed’ to murdering the student and allegedly told police where her body is

Dipesh Gadher
Home Affairs Correspondent

It was during the Friday evening rush hour in Ealing, west London, that Elizabeth Chau, 19, vanished into thin air. The computer studies student had just handed in an assignment at Thames Valley University, and was on her way home to her family. She was last seen walking along the busy Uxbridge Road, close to a police station, on April 16, 1999.

Now, 24 years later, the serial killer Levi Bellfield has allegedly confessed to the teenager’s abduction and murder, and revealed to police the possible location of her body. The spot is understood to be close to Kempton Park racecourse in Surrey, about 10 miles from where Chau disappeared.

On Wednesday, detectives at Scotland Yard are expected to meet the teenager’s family to brief them on what Bellfield told two officers who interviewed him under caution last week at HMP Frankland, Co Durham. Forensics experts could start digging for Chau’s remains afterwards.

Bellfield, 54, is serving whole life tariffs for the murders of Milly Dowler, 13, in 2002, Marsha McDonnell, 19, in 2003, and Amélie Delagrang, 22, in 2004. All the victims were brutally attacked in southwest London and Surrey. Kempton Park is a few miles from Walton-on-Thames, where Dowler was abducted.

Although Chau’s family are aware of Bellfield’s propensity to lie and manipulate, they are cautiously optimistic that their long quest for closure – marred by claims of racism and police indifference – may be nearing an end.

Suresh Grover of the Monitoring Group, an anti-racism organisation that has been helping the family since Chau disappeared, said: “They just want Elizabeth’s body back, so that they can lay her to rest with the dignity and respect that she deserves. They want justice.”

The youngest of three siblings, Chau was born in Britain after her parents came here as refugees in the 1970s in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. They quickly found work running a Chinese takeaway in west London.

On the day that she failed to return home from university, her family immediately knew something was wrong because Chau would always phone them if she was staying overnight with a friend. When she was reported missing at

ENTERPRISE NEWS AND PICTURES: NICHOLAS RAZZELL, PA



Elizabeth Chau, a computer studies student, vanished in 1999. Levi Bellfield, who murdered Millie Dowler, top, and Marsha McDonnell, has apparently admitted killing her

“
CCTV footage was obtained by Chau’s sister, not police

lunchtime the following day, police initially classed her case as “low risk” because she was an adult. It meant that the family had to carry out their own searches and even collect their own CCTV footage from businesses along the route Chau would have walked.

Images of her last known sighting, captured at 6.18pm close to Ealing police station on Uxbridge Road, were obtained by her older sister, Bic-Hang, now 48, rather than by officers assigned to the case.

“From the beginning to now, the police have failed us,” she told The Guardian last month. “We have felt ignored and dismissed because of our race and because of Elizabeth’s gender.” The reference to gender is thought to relate to suggestions Chau may have been lured into prostitution or had run away

after becoming pregnant. At one point, the Metropolitan Police are believed to have closed the case after concluding that Chau was most likely killed by Andrezej Kanowski, a convicted rapist and murderer from Poland known as “The Beast”. Police dug up his garden, but he maintained his innocence. He died in 2009.

The potential breakthrough involving Bellfield, a former nightclub bouncer who had lived in west London, first came in October last year when he allegedly confessed to Chau’s murder in a conversation with an official prison visitor.

Grover claimed the prison visitor alerted the Home Office and the Met at the time, but no action appears to have been taken. In March this year, the prison visitor is said to have contacted the Chau family directly. Bellfield also repeated his

confession in a written statement to his solicitor, Theresa Clark, in which he gave horrific details of Chau’s final hours and where he had buried her body. He also admitted to non-fatal attacks on up to six other women.

Last week Bellfield allegedly confessed to Chau’s murder for the third time in a six-hour prison interview with two Met officers who are part of a team specialising in unsolved homicides. However, he has retracted confessions on a number of previous occasions.

The Met said: “On Tuesday, May 9, a 54-year-old male was interviewed under caution. Inquiries continue. We can confirm we remain in contact with Elizabeth Chau’s family. At this time we will not be providing an ongoing commentary.” @dipeshgadher

Clothing bill grows faster than the kids

Louise Eccles and Venetia Menzies

They need new clothes constantly and their school shoes tend not to last for more than a few terms –but the cost of childrenswear is rising at double the rate of adult clothing, according to official figures.

Between March 2022 and March 2023, the price of children’s clothes and footwear rose by 12 per cent compared with 6 per cent for women and 7 per cent for men, according to the Office for National Statistics.

For some items, the rise is even more stark. The cost of children’s sports trainers has leapt by 33 per cent, typically costing an extra £8.61.

Parents have questioned whether retailers are slapping a premium on children’s clothing because families must buy new clothes as their children grow, but experts insist their hands have been forced. Fiona McDonald, a retail analyst at the market research firm Mintel, said retailers, such as Primark and Marks & Spencer, have been trying to keep down prices, particularly of uniforms.

She added: “However, the economic environment and the cost of raw materials have continued to put pressure on the fashion industry, and childrenswear retailers can no longer hold off passing on the increasing costs to consumers. Children’s clothing prices are also lower than women’s or men’s to begin with, so any increase is felt by consumers more.”

The price rises are pushing more parents to buy second-hand clothes for their children. Kayleigh Shore, 36, who runs Be Diddy, a children’s vintage clothing shop and online retailer in Manchester, handpicks, repairs and dry-cleans items such as hand-knitted 1980s jumpers. She said: “The cost of living crisis means every penny counts and people are looking for value.” @Louise_Eccles

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Squatters took over my villa – and police said I had to pay their bills

Gangs are occupying Britons’ second homes in Spain and the law helps them to do it. The only way to get rid of the invaders is to shell out thousands to send in the ‘heavies’

Katie Tarrant Barcelona

Sophie Robinson arrived at her Ibiza villa with her two daughters for their Easter break at midnight – and found another family had moved in.

The 48-year-old British yoga teacher was confronted by a man and woman, with their children, who had changed the locks and were refusing to leave. When the police arrived, officers told her that she would have to continue paying the water and electricity bills for the squatters until she secured an eviction notice.

Armed Guardia Civil came to evict the squatters last week and found a different, single man living in the villa in San Antonio. There were no signs of children but the police did find locks fitted on each bedroom door and drugs scattered over the floor.

Along with dozens of other Brits with second homes in Spain, Robinson had fallen victim to an occupation movement that new legislation is expected to exacerbate. In Ibiza, the gangs occupying empty properties are thought to be con-



nected to the drugs trade; elsewhere in Spain, they are known as the “extortion mafia”. They are exploiting the Spanish constitution which affords every citizen “the right to adequate housing”. After 48 hours, squatters gain the right to live there and can only be evicted by judicial order. Robinson was lucky. Getting rid of them can take years.

RANSOM DEMANDS

The encroachment of *los okupas* (squatters) increased during the pandemic as the government legislated to prevent snap evictions, strengthening the rights of those unable to afford rent.

In Ibiza last week, The Sunday Times found that lawyers, property experts and businesses which forcibly remove squatters believe that the majority of occupations are linked to criminal gangs. They are selling the owners’ possessions and demanding ransoms of more than €3,000 to leave.

Francisco Sancho Jaraiz, a

lawyer, deals with dozens of British and European clients whose second homes are occupied on the island every year and represented Robinson.

The original man and his partner who had occupied her villa are part of a family who are allegedly a front for a network run by criminal gangs. “It is always the same child who comes to the door crying, but we do not know who he is. He is an enigma,” Sancho Jaraiz said. “It goes like this: the family first enters the property, they take possessions to sell and then the criminals move in and live there, sometimes for as long as two years.”

If police catch the squatters removing belongings, they can arrest them; but occupants who have been in the property for more than 48 hours can only be removed with an eviction notice ordered by a judge – even if, like Robinson, the owner shows property deeds to police.

“This is an embarrassment for Spain,” Sancho Jaraiz said. “We have a floating population of one million in Ibiza and tourists can move the economy. Yet this is the price they pay for choosing here because the law does not respect them.”

‘LEGAL EXPLOITATION’

La ley de vivienda (the Housing Bill), agreed by the Spanish parliament last month, gives even stronger rights to squatters.

“They’re already protected in Spain more than they are anywhere else on the planet, but this law means that it will take two years of social services before you can even get an eviction going,” said Mark Stücklin, the Barcelona-based founder of the website Spanish Property Insight.

A creaking judicial system means that victims such as Robinson wait an average of 18 months for eviction notices to reclaim the properties they own, compared with 48 hours in France and 24 hours in Germany.

“Podemos [one of the socialist parties making up the Spanish coalition government] has rolled over and given the hard left everything they want,” Stücklin said. “It’s a legislative catastrophe which will have untold consequences.”

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, swathes of properties seized by banks stood empty and became ripe for *los*

Sophie Robinson, right, found squatters in her villa in San Antonio in Ibiza. Homeowners are calling in eviction firms such as Fuera Okupas, run by Jorge Fe, below

okupas. “The first *okupas* were people in need, but they only occupied repossessed properties,” said Santi Ventalló, co-director of the Catalan law firm Colomer Ventalló, which specialises in property litigation. “It was a political and social movement.”

“The government will tell you the bill is for the vulnerable,” said Stücklin, “but often it’s exploited by organised crime. It is state-sanctioned exploitation.”

“If they’re in for 48 hours you need an eviction notice”

BOLD APPROACH

For the squatter removal firms, however, the movement is not a matter of politics, but business. “*Desocupas* work in a more pressured way than the police by going in and negotiating with the squatters,” Ventalló said. “There’s the way of the judiciary – and there’s the *desocupas*.”

One of the most popular firms in Spain is Fuera Okupas, which translates as “Get out occupiers” and was formerly a debt collectors’ business. Jorge Fe, the boss, saw a gap in the market in 2018 when home occupations were on the rise and



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switched his business model accordingly.

Fe, 51, who has trained in a Russian form of jiu jitsu and boxing since he was 16, operates the business from a cramped office in Barcelona city centre. Fuera Okupas has a gorilla as part of its logo under the Latin motto *Fortes fortuna adiuvat* – fortune favours the bold.

The company claims a 97 per cent success rate in the 4,000 cases it has handled. In only 2 per cent of cases does it encounter people who are in genuine need, he says.

“Occupations used to be socially acceptable because it was a reaction to a shortage in housing, but since gangs learnt they could take advantage we have seen a boom,” Fe said.

“We don’t blame the police because they do all they can – but they do not have the backing of the law. We operate just within the law. It does not allow us to use force, although sometimes we would like to make use of it.”

Negotiation with the squatters varies depending on each case, but Fuera Okupas starts by visiting them and trying to mediate in the dispute, often accompa-

nied by the in-house lawyer. The next step is to wait for the squatters to leave the property – and make their return impossible by blocking all entrance points. Fuera Okupas usually charges €2,500 per job.

The company’s tactics helped Michael Reagan, 74, from London, when his villa in Sitges, southwest of Barcelona, was occupied in 2021. His neighbour first alerted him to squatters in his three-bedroom flat in the coastal town during the pandemic by sending him a photo of them on his terrace, watching television and playing backgammon.

Reagan says he paid the “heavies” €3,500, with half upfront. The firm went to talk to the squatters, who turned out to be a group of young Moroccans. Police called by the squatters told the company to “ease off a bit”, Reagan said.

The firm claimed the squatters wanted €5,000 to leave but that they had negotiated down to €2,000. Reagan didn’t question this because “I just wanted them out”. Four days later they were gone.

“I’d only dealt with these people on the phone – they were very polite gentlemen and I thought they were all lawyers wearing suits,” Reagan said. “When I saw all these photographs I thought they looked like Hell’s Angels. But you’re caught in between a rock and a hard place because the law is very ineffectual.”

Almost three years since filing for an eviction notice, he still has not had a response from the police or a judge regarding his complaint. Without Fuera Okupas, he could still have squatters on the property, he said.

SMALL RISK, HIGH COST

About 800,000 Brits own a property in Spain and prices there are expected to rise 8 per cent in 2023 overall, according to market analysts. In the popular holiday destination of the Costa del Sol, the increase could be as much as 11 per cent.

“It’s one of those problems where the risk is very very small but the cost is very very high,” Stücklin said.

Reagan tells friends who are looking to buy in Spain not to be discouraged by his experience, though the effects still linger. He paid €10,000 to replace the door and locks broken by the gang and pays €70 a month in wi-fi bills for an alarm system that will alert him, not the police, if a break-in occurs.

In Ibiza, Robinson is hoping to sell her three-bedroom property on one of the quieter streets of Spain’s party capital. “We were lucky to have this solved so quickly, but there’s such a massive gap between rich and poor here and with high flyers and drugs circulating, it’s not the same place it was 20 years ago,” she said. “It’s a very dark side of the island.”

@KatieTarrant

Feeling stressed? Why not forage for garlic and seaweed – then cook it up

Hannah Al-Othman

In a woodland clearing, a pot of vegetables bubbles away over a campfire, the smoke spiralling up through the trees.

Armed with gardening gloves and plastic bowls, a group of people are picking some of the nettles and wild garlic that grow in abundance, and adding them to the silver pan – the star ingredients of an outdoor lunch.

The group of people foraging for food are participants in an outdoor cooking course near Thornton-Cleveleys, in Lancashire, funded by the NHS and supported by the local council, with the aim of helping people to deal with the stresses of modern life.

Those who take part can sign up themselves, but some have been referred by GPs, community mental-health teams or other professionals. The free sessions teach people how to cook simple meals, grow their own food, forage and look after their wellbeing.

Participants have learnt to cook a range of meals – from wild garlic pesto pasta, to double-bean chilli with foraged jelly ear mushrooms, to miso soup with seaweed gathered from the beach, and butternut squash and nettle curry.

They are taught to identify edible plants, and how to forage in a safe and sustainable way, only taking what they need, and never taking whole plants.

They have learnt how to safely light fires, and how to grow their own fruits and vegetables from seed, and are nurturing tomato seedlings at home that they planted together.

They have made new connections, and found somewhere they can talk freely about any pressures or



Those on the course have learnt to make meals that use stinging nettles and wild garlic

anxieties. The project was supposed to run for five weeks, facilitated by a £5,000 NHS cost of living grant, but the classes have been so popular that they are continuing into the summer with new participants. It is thought to be the only such course in the UK.

The NHS funding covered the initial set-up costs: the pots and pans, a large parachute with a chimney to

release the smoke, which allows the cooking courses to continue in poor weather, and the construction of a den in the woods, with log stools around a campfire. After these outlays, the course is cheap to run.

Chloe Desmond, one of the staff members from The Bay, which is providing the project, said that the course was full within two days of posting information about it on social media.

Julie Hewitt, 52, a children’s social worker who is taking part in the course, said: “It puts you in a good mood, and it means that you’re just sitting in this environment without thinking about other stuff. I’ve had some traumatic experiences recently, out of my control, such as witnessing a fatal road traffic accident last week. There can be all sorts of stuff go on in life – things that you don’t

expect either – and sometimes you just need that headspace.”

Even in cold weather, Hewitt said, the group still loved their sessions, huddled under the parachute in their bobble hats – the green of the outdoors and the soundtrack of birdsong was still a balm for the soul, whatever the weather.

“I’ve never planted anything from seed before,” she said. “Now I’ve got loads on the windowsill, all kinds of sprouting, bak choy and cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce leaves and all that. It’s all starting to come through.”

Yusuf Kurt, 61, a retired heating engineer who had to give up work due to ill health, moved to the area during lockdown to be closer to his daughter and son-in-law, and the course has helped him to make new friends.

“You meet new people. You’re outdoors, foraging,”

he said. “Since we started doing it, when I go out for walks with my wife the other day, I filled a bag of wild garlic, young leaves, and we’ve been using them in salad, instead of spinach, we’ve been using them in curries, it’s absolutely brilliant.”

In a therapy session last week, Ras Thomasen, 64, and his therapist agreed that he could be discharged, because his mental health has improved considerably since doing the course.

“It’s a real good help to overcome a fear of going out, or a fear of meeting or talking to people,” he said. “I think it’s a lot of things. To be out in nature . . . [and] while we do something like bird watching or taking photographs at the beach, they bring in conversations about mental health, so it’s helpful to talk and open up.”

@HannahAlOthman

“
I filled a bag of wild leaves and put them in our salad



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Rod Liddle

The north gets the railways the south thinks we deserve — TransPennine Depressed



Are you enjoying your new Elizabeth line, you smug, pampered, southern bastards? We up here very much hope you are. That's exactly what we think to ourselves when we're standing on the platform at Darlo listening to some bloke telling us over the Tannoy that the Trans-Pennine Express service to Manchester Victoria has been cancelled because nobody half-way sentient could be found to drive it.

Or when the Middlesbrough and Saltburn service heaves its sorry way into the station, clanking and growling and dripping diesel oil out of its antiquated backside. We think to ourselves: well, at least southerners can enjoy 40 brand new trains an hour from Slough to Dagenham, or something – so somebody is benefiting from our high taxes. And how glad we are it's them. Because we've always had a soft spot for southerners, you know.

It is inconceivable that the service that links Darlington and Saltburn, via almost all of the Tees Valley (population 1.2 million), would be allowed to exist in such a form if those places were in the southeast. It would be electrified, for a start, thus improving the journey time by about 30 per cent. I don't think the TransPennine service would have lasted down south either, although some of you might have been quite excited by the "trans" bit of its name, wondering if it was the UK's first gender-fluid rail service.

TransPennine was run by First Group, which has form for dodgy services. It has now been renationalised because even this government recognises that a service in which one in six trains get cancelled (as happened in March this year) is pretty much useless. Heading to Manchester airport from the eastern side of the country? Make sure your flights are refundable – or, better still, take the car, because you could never trust TransPennine to turn up.

Perhaps now the service will improve

– but it will still be slow, torturously slow, because there has been no investment in the infrastructure. Sorry to labour the point, but that has all gone down south, or on constructing a brilliant new high-speed service that will allow Londoners to get to Birmingham and Manchester even more quickly than they can already. But getting from Liverpool to Leeds, or Newcastle to Manchester? Take the car. The train will dredge hours and hours from your life and require a substantial proportion of your savings. If it turns up.

Is it important that we have investment which might improve the transport links between various grim, red-brick northern dumps filled with Greggs and Poundlands, rather than providing decent, God-fearing, middle-class people in Berkshire with an extra 50 trains a day to deposit them in whatever part of London they choose? Only, I suppose, in that it should be the essence of that chimeric thing, "levelling-up" – that the 30 million or so of us who live north of Warks and Cambs should have a transport infrastructure

“I am aware British Rail was not the apogee of excellence — but it cost far less than this

with a similar level of investment and services to those 30 million or so who live south of those counties.

That will only happen, I suspect, if the entire rail service is nationalised, not just the limping, errant, sorry oxymoron of the TransPennine Express. Yes, I am well aware that British Rail was not always the apogee of excellence – but I also know that we spend more today in real terms on subsidising our rail network than we did when the thing was in public hands. Meanwhile, the divisions between north and south grow ever more stark. The first step in, uh, turbocharging a city's economy is to make sure people can actually get to the place, quickish. And then get the hell out of it when they've done their business.

Granted, I'm a communitarian and a rail romantic. I think a healthy, rapid and effective public transport service benefits a nation state in far more profound ways than simply allowing people to get to places quickly. I believe in the utilitarian side of rail transport – the necessity of shipping millions of people hither and thither quickly and cheaply – but also in the pleasure of rail transport, a notion that is swiftly being lost.

That is why I can't abide demands to abolish first class: you are removing at a stroke one of the assets of rail travel, the ability to transport people in a degree of pleasant, insular luxury. And, frankly, the kinds of people one finds travelling in second class these days ... well, I'm sure they are absolutely lovely, but one shouldn't be forced to meet them.

There you are, then: chippy inverted snobbery and real, proper snobbery. I can do both, when the mood takes. Such as when the Tannoy has sounded again telling me not to travel anywhere at all next week because the eight drivers covering the north of England are all sick or on strike and contractors are hacking bits out of the track near York so there will be a replacement bus service via Leeds. "Please allow extra time for your journey and take a sleeping bag."

Archbishop fined for speeding



PHOTOBUBBLE: NICK NEWMAN

● Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, has been taking his blue pencil to a bunch of books used for teaching kids in the state's schools. Looking at the hilarious misinformation they contain, I'm tempted to think he has a point.

Take this statement about "socialist economies": apparently they "keep things nice and even and without unnecessary waste" and "may

promote greater equality among people while still providing a fully functioning government-supervised economy". What utopian state do the authors have in mind? North Korea? The old Soviet Union? Vietnam?

When Ron is done with his blue pencil, perhaps he could send it over here. I suspect some of our school books could do with it too.

We've reached the age of insanity

I wonder if there is a way we might reach out and help the deeply confused Scottish authorities.

Only a month or so ago the Scottish courts decided that a 17-year-old boy who had raped a girl could not be held properly responsible because, at that age, his brain was not fully mature. Now Scotland's Care Inspectorate has decided that 12-year-old children are mature enough to choose to take life-changing puberty-blockers with a view to switching genders.

Perhaps the people who run the place north of Berwick are all taking too much methadone in their porridge.

Take me to your leader, you \$*%!

Scientists believe that a mysterious fast radio burst (FRB) emanating from light years distant in the cosmos may be an alien species trying to make contact with us. The repeated FRB 20190520B was detected some time ago and has become the focus of research. The message, if it is one, is necessarily brief.

My suspicion is that the aliens are a little uncouth, and are screaming a heartfelt "F*** off!" across the universe. Either that, or the signal is a concise code that, when we crack it, will turn out to mean: "Can we have Ed Davey back now, please?"

● Prison guards have been told not to refer to former prisoners as "ex-cons". Instead they are "persons with lived experience". But aren't we all "persons with lived experience"? And how can you have an "unlived experience"?

You can always judge the value of an ideology by the vacuous and deluding nature of its grammar.

THE SUNDAY TIMES RICH LIST

35 years of...
"I told you I didn't need to go to university..."



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GANGLAND



Christy Kinahan was once known as an “ordinary decent criminal” on the streets of Dublin – and was virtually unheard of outside them. He burgled houses, stole cars and forged cheques in the 1970s before being jailed for drug possession in 1987.

Prison changed him. He immersed himself in education and when he was released five years later set about building a criminal organisation that would become one of the most feared in the world. The cartel, which he runs with his sons Daniel, 45, and Christopher Jr, 42, sits at the apex of transnational crime. It has forged alliances with Colombian and Mexican drug cartels, the Italian ‘Ndrangheta and the Vory, Russia’s organised crime fraternity.

Now the family is under investigation for supporting Iran and its Shia proxy Hezbollah, a relationship that has become the overriding problem for the US Treasury and Drug Enforcement Administration and their allies in European law enforcement.

Earlier this year, British counter-terrorism officers revealed that police and the security services had foiled 15 plots by Iran to either kidnap or kill “enemies of the regime”. It came after Iran International TV closed its London studios on the advice of the Metropolitan Police, who said they could not keep the staff and public safe.

John O’Driscoll, a retired assistant Irish garda commissioner who lobbied Washington to pursue the Kinahans, said the US regarded the cartel as posing a direct threat to American interests and also the global order. “The American authorities have taken the view that while the cartel may not be involved in supplying drugs into the United States, the Kinahans’ reckless involvement in financing Hezbollah and international terrorism is another matter,” he said.

TIES TO DUTCH ASSASSIN

The first evidence of the cartel’s connections to Iran and its allies emerged in 2016 when Naoufal Fassih, a Dutch criminal of Moroccan origin, was found living in a Dublin apartment under the assumed name of Omar Ghazouani.

Fassih, 42, had the appearance of a streetwise but uber-wealthy drug dealer. He lived in splendour in the city centre, wore trainers worth €800 and his special edition watch cost €40,000. Detectives investigating gangland murders linked to a feud between the Kinahans and their rivals in Ireland’s Hutch crime organisation had gone to the apartment after it was identified as a safe house used by gunmen loyal to the Kinahans.

To the surprise of the Irish security services, Interpol told the garda that Fassih was a wanted man. The Dutch were seeking him in connection with the 2015 murder of Mohammad Reza Kolahi Samadi, a 56-year-old Iranian sentenced to death by Tehran. Samadi was accused of planting a bomb at the Islamic Republic party’s headquarters in Tehran in 1981, killing 73 people, and was living with his wife and family under an assumed name in Almere, a city in the Netherlands, when he was shot outside his home.

AIVD, the Dutch security service, concluded that Samadi’s murder was one of two political assassinations that Iran had carried out on Dutch soil. The killings, and similar investigations that revealed Tehran’s involvement in a planned bomb attack in Paris and a thwarted assassination in Denmark, triggered the imposition of EU sanctions in 2019.

Security services in Europe began researching Iran’s use of criminal gangs to target dissidents.

Ulysse Ellian, a Dutch politician of Iranian descent, believes Fassih was “used” by more powerful forces.

“Fassih was found guilty of ordering the murder but his trial heard he didn’t

even know the identity of the victim. Iran had asked the Kinahans to have this guy in the Netherlands killed and they instructed Fassih to do it. Fassih then hired the shooters,” he said.

“But the murder was a political act. It terrified Iranian dissidents across Europe. The regime showed it would liaise with criminals to kill its enemies. If you help Iran to murder its enemies in Europe you are much more than a criminal gang, you are a threat to European security.”

The full extent of the Kinahans’ relationship with Tehran and Hezbollah soon became apparent. Investigations into the cartel’s vast wealth discovered it had used Hezbollah’s hawala underground banking system – a way of transferring money between countries without moving cash.

It involves handing cash to a person in one country and then a colleague or hawaladar dispensing the same sum elsewhere. The system has existed for hundreds of years in the Middle East but Hezbollah and the cartel modernised it by introducing encrypted codes for extra security. European and US intelligence believe the cartel has used the payment system to make payments to South American drug cartels among others.

Hezbollah is believed to have generated hundreds of millions of dollars through its arrangement with the Kinahans by charging a commission for each transaction, which it has in turn used to finance terrorism in Lebanon and Syria.

PLANES-FOR-IRAN MISSION

This is only one strand of the mutually beneficial relationship. Christy Kinahan has been implicated in attempts to buy second-hand aircraft and spare parts in Africa and central America for Iran’s armed forces using an assortment of false identities and offshore companies.

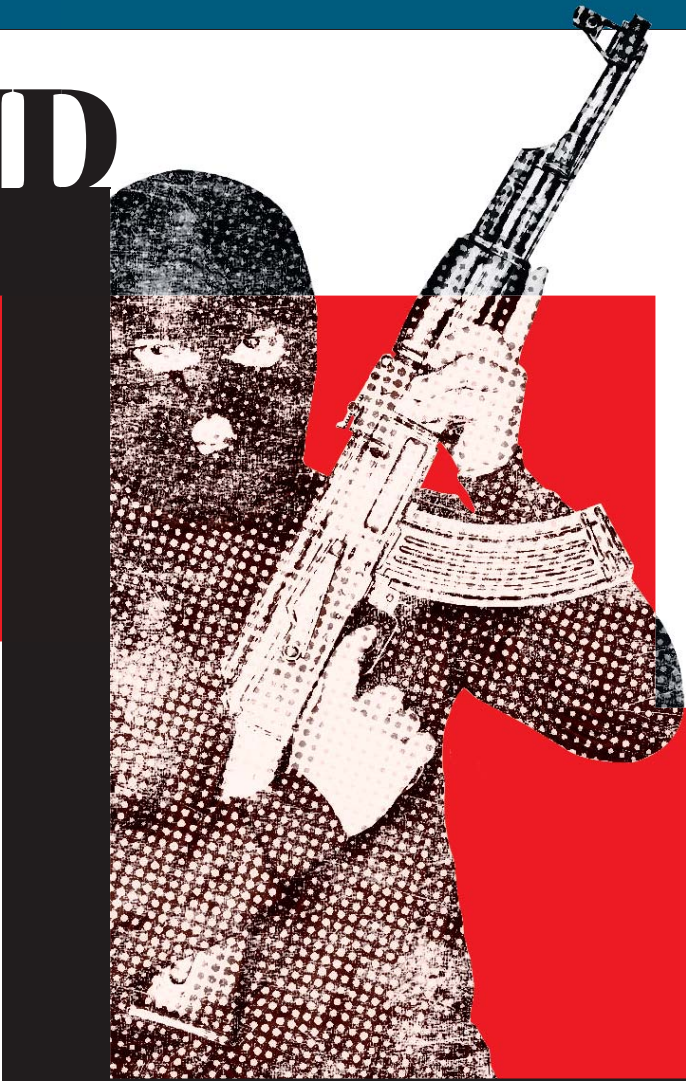
He was linked to attempts to buy a small fleet of aircraft from the Egyptian military in 2019 on behalf of a charity based in Singapore on the pretext that it would offer air ambulance services in central Africa. Kinahan had used an abbreviation of his name to attend aviation conferences and attempt to assume control of Nyasa Air Charters, a tiny airline in Malawi, and Crescents and Crosses, a Singapore charity purporting to offer logistical services to aid agencies in Africa. The conspiracy was thwarted when the authorities in Zimbabwe, where Kinahan had tried to register an aviation firm and obtain residency, became suspicious and sought information from the US.

The deal, if it had proceeded, would have resulted in Sea Dream Middle East General Trading LLC, one of the Dubai-based companies controlled by Kinahan and his cartel, buying nine de Havilland Canada DHC-5 Buffalo aircraft from the Egyptian air force. The security services believe Kinahan was attempting to source the aircraft for Iranian agents, or possibly sublease them to Iranian airlines. He used the name Christopher Vincent to create a new identity on LinkedIn to organise the deals. “Kinahan now operates as a contractor for Iran. He is no longer an ordinary criminal,” said an intelligence source.

US TAKES ACTION

Ireland’s police force was the first to uncover the cartel’s connections to Hezb-

“
They’re led by a former taxi driver from Dublin



AXIS OF EVIL

ollah and Iran, possibly through its own intelligence collecting. It freely admits to using this to encourage Washington to impose the sweeping sanctions it announced last year, prohibiting financial institutions and businesses conducting financial transactions with the Kinahans, their associates and companies they control.

Until 2020, the US had not given serious consideration to pursuing a criminal gang led by a former taxi driver from Dublin. After the US and British security services received the intelligence, Washington moved with speed. The US may extradite members of the gang to face murder, drug trafficking charges and terrorist financing charges, if they can be found.

IRAN’S CRIMINAL PROXIES

Iran’s intelligence services – the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its overseas operations Qods force – have for decades used criminals and Hezbollah to circumvent sanctions and organise political violence on its behalf, according to Ivan Sascha Sheehan, an Iran policy expert at the College of Public Affairs at the University of Baltimore.

“Hezbollah was created and is trained, financed, and armed by the IRGC. In many countries where the Iranian regime cannot carry out operations directly, Lebanese Hezbollah is responsible for surveillance and spearheads operations,” said Sheehan.

In return, criminal groups receive reciprocal benefits from Iran’s security services in support of their own agendas, said Lincoln Bloomfield, a retired US diplomat and former national security adviser. Money, protection and access to drug shipments from producer countries are among the benefits.

“This is a ruthless regime that observes no constraints in seeking to hold on to power. This regime has staged assassinations and attempted assassinations in many countries including France, Switzerland, Germany, Turkey, Italy and Japan among others,” added Bloomfield.

But the Kinahan cartel’s silent transition into a narco-terrorist group may ultimately be its downfall because it has pushed Washington into pursuing an aggressive policy against them.

The US has used its diplomatic leverage to force the United Arab Emirates, where the Kinahan family once lived, to freeze their assets. Many of the cartel’s associates have been arrested and extradited to face charges.

The Kinahan cartel, the world’s most-wanted drugs gang, is now being linked by US agents to a web of terror – including Iranian killers and Hezbollah fanatics, reveals *John Mooney*



But Kinahan and his cartel is a criminal organisation like no other and has shown itself to be highly durable. His whereabouts and those of his sons and their associates are unknown.

They fled their luxurious homes in Dubai when the US sanctions were announced and vanished without trace. Christy Kinahan may have reached Asia but Daniel and Christopher Jr are

believed to be moving between the UAE, Qatar and possibly Jordan.

Daniel Kinahan has been frozen out by boxers he used to promote, including Tyson Fury, with whom he has been pictured.

Many, including O’Driscoll, believe the cartel will use the alliances it has forged with Iran and Hezbollah to ensure their escape and survival. “I think the world

has now woken up to how dangerous groups like this can become,” he said.

From its beginnings on the streets of Dublin, it has learned to evade law enforcement, annihilate its rivals and expand its influence around the globe. These skills have shaped its way of thinking about crime, its capacity for projecting power and its ability to survive.

@johnmooneyIRL

Mushrooms may be magic for depression

Ben Spencer Science Editor

Psychiatrists have called for relaxation of laws controlling the active substance in magic mushrooms, to make it easier to research as a treatment for depression.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists joined MPs, charities and campaign groups in signing a letter to the Home Office urging the reclassification of the psychedelic compound

psilocybin. There is a Commons debate on the issue, due on Thursday.

Psilocybin, which studies suggest could be effective at treating post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anorexia and anxiety, is a schedule 1 controlled substance under the Misuse of Drugs Regulations. Heroin and cocaine are subject to less restrictive rules, falling under schedule 2 as they have medical uses.

Campaigners say this hampers research, with scientists forced to apply to the Home Office for each research licence. Once they get permission to test the drugs, they have to keep supplies under lock and key, with CCTV cameras trained on secure fridges. Dr Adrian James, president of the college, said: “There are indications from studies that psilocybin has the potential to provide positive outcomes

for people with some of the most resistant depression. Therefore, we are calling on government to ensure that the drug is scheduled in a way that gives researchers the access they need to expand and increase the pace of their work.”

The Home Office said it sympathised with patients suffering from distressing conditions and could understand the desire to seek the best possible treatment.

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SERHII NUZHNIENKO/REUTERS; BOGH DAN KUTIEPOV/AP; ALAMY



General who saved Kyiv now turning battle for Bakhmut

Ukraine’s counteroffensive could decide the war. At its helm is a tactical mastermind ‘who will go down in history’

Jack Clover

Over months of grim, attritional warfare that left tens of thousands of young men from both sides lying dead in the black soil, the state of Ukraine’s defence was often condensed down to two words: “Bakhmut holds.”

Last Wednesday the message suddenly changed.

The men of the 3rd Assault Brigade stood proud in a row, faces obscured by patchy underground strip-lighting. “In separate areas the enemy could not withstand the pressure of Ukrainian defenders and withdrew to a distance of up to 2 kilometres,” wrote Colonel General Oleksandr Syrsky, commander of Ukraine’s ground forces, in a post accompanying the photo on Telegram.

Pictures soon emerged of Ukrainian forces around Bakhmut surging through woodland shredded by gunfire to overwhelm Russian positions.

After months of rationing precious shells, they unleashed a barrage of artillery and rushed on Russian positions to the west and southwest of the town. There were also reports of advances in and around several villages northwest of

“
Syrsky drives a 2017 Renault

Bakhmut. In the fog of war the detail is unclear but some of the gains have been backed up by geolocated footage.

In Russia, fears grew of a possible encirclement of the Wagner Group mercenaries remaining in Bakhmut. Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner’s founder, raged: “Stories of tactical withdrawals are nothing more than fleeing, skedaddling, total cowardice – something that will heap shame on the history of our country for many years.”

In the West, analysts pondered on whether this was the beginning of a great offensive. Last night a leading Russian newspaper reported that two Russian fighter jets and two military helicopters had been shot down in Russia.

Earlier Syrsky, 57, addressed his men again: “Our warriors are moving forward in several areas of the front, the enemy is losing machinery and men. Glory to Ukraine and our heroes!”

Valeriy Zaluzhny, who is eight years younger than Syrsky and once ranked below him, is the commander in chief of Ukraine’s armed forces. But he is based in Kyiv alongside the political leadership, where he bears responsibility for overall strategy comprising all parts of the military on the ground, in the air and at sea.

GENERAL SYRSKY’S WAR

- ◆ Russian-controlled
- 1 Feb 25, 2022 to Apr 2, 2022
- 2 Sept 6, 2022 to Oct 2, 2022
- 3 August 1, 2022 - present



Source: Institute for the Study of War

At the front, on an operational level, Syrsky, the equivalent of the head of the army, carries the can. The general is fast becoming one of this century’s most compelling military figures. The three most significant Ukrainian operations in the war have been the defence of Kyiv, the lighting offensive in the Kharkiv region last summer and the grinding battle to thwart Russia’s efforts to take Bakhmut: Syrsky was at the helm of all three.

Operational responsibility for the offensive, which is expected to be imminent, will lie at his feet too.

Syrsky is an ascetic, bookish figure: a stark contrast to his medallioned Russian counterparts. He is described by colleagues as obsessed with planning – and the gym. Before the war he lived in a flat in Kyiv with his wife Tamara and his son Oleksandr. He earns roughly £14,000 a year and drives a 2017 Renault Mégane, according to his declaration of interests from 2018. The couple also own a dacha outside Kyiv and half an acre of land.

Born in a village in the Vladimir region of Russia when it was still part of the USSR, Syrsky is well-versed in the Soviet, and now Russian, methods of warfare.

He studied at the Moscow Higher Military Command School, a Soviet equiva-

“
Russians had to swim to stay alive

lent of Sandhurst, but has been based in Ukraine since the 1980s.

He worked his way up the ranks of the nascent Ukrainian armed forces before earning the rank of major general as the commander of the 72nd Mechanised Brigade. In November 2013, as protests erupted in Kyiv’s Maidan square, Syrsky was sent to Brussels as Ukraine’s representative to discuss how to bring its armed forces up to Nato standards.

In February 2015, at the peak of the war in east Ukraine against undeclared Russian forces and pro-Russian separatists, Syrsky oversaw the withdrawal of 6,000 Ukrainian troops from Debaltseve, the last big clash before the Minsk II agreement allowed for a fragile ceasefire.

Before the invasion last year, while President Zelensky downplayed the likelihood of an attack on Kyiv, Syrsky’s generals were preparing behind the scenes.

One week beforehand, Syrsky, now head of ground forces, had moved all the army’s main air assets and helicopters off large bases to stop them from being obvious targets for airstrikes.

He divided Kyiv and the surrounding countryside into sectors, each led by generals from military training facilities in

Christina Lamb Pakistan has a history of arresting PMs. But this is different



In 35 years of covering Pakistan there is barely a single prime minister that I haven’t seen in the dock of a court or being bundled into a police van. Locking up former leaders had been part of political life for decades before Imran Khan’s detention on Tuesday made global headlines.

Benazir Bhutto was arrested under her rival Nawaz Sharif. She then had him jailed when she returned to power – after which he did the same back, also locking up her husband Asif Zardari for good measure. She was assassinated in 2007. Sharif was incarcerated again when Khan, the former cricket star, took office five years ago, as was his daughter and his brother Shehbaz Sharif, who is now prime minister.

“This is unfortunately the way of Pakistan,” says Husain Haqqani, a former adviser to both Sharif and Bhutto. “There is a long tradition of charging former prime ministers with corruption. Imran Khan cheered on when Benazir Bhutto was arrested and when Nawaz Sharif was arrested and now it’s his turn.”

This time, however, was different with paramilitary troops storming into Islama-

bad High Court to arrest Khan, 70. The message was clear: the instigators were the country’s powerful military.

His arrest followed a series of ill-advised tweets and a speech attacking the army and its military intelligence directorate ISI. He named a senior ISI general, whom he refers to as “Dirty Harry”, and accused him of masterminding an assassination attempt on him last November.

When Khan’s supporters began rioting after the arrest, they targeted army buildings. More than 3,000 Khan supporters were arrested during the protests, which left at least ten people dead and 200 police officers injured.

Once, Khan and the army were close. Even after he recast himself from an Oxford-educated playboy with a wealthy English wife in Jemima Goldsmith, to a pious leader married to a devout woman in a burqa whom he calls his “spiritual guru”, he struggled to convert his vast national popularity into political capital. It was the military that made his election as prime minister possible in 2018.

But, over time, the army lost patience with his government’s ineptitude and in

April 2022 they backed a no-confidence vote to oust him. Khan has not forgiven them and has repeatedly brought thousands of supporters onto the streets.

“He has become the army’s Frankenstein monster,” said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center in Washington. “He was their favoured son but then not willing to go quietly into the night after his ouster.”

The Supreme Court ruled that Khan’s arrest last week was unlawful and on Friday he was granted bail for two weeks.

However, the crisis has not passed. Khan has made clear whom he blamed. “It’s one man, the army chief,” he told reporters. “There is no democracy in the army.” In an address broadcast on YouTube last night, he urged supporters to protest across Pakistan today. “Freedom does not come easily,” he said. “You have to snatch it. You have to sacrifice for it.”

He has personal history with the recently appointed General Asim Munir, the head of the army. As prime minister, Khan sacked him as chief of the ISI after Munir presented him with evidence that his wife and her associates were involved



Benazir Bhutto was arrested and jailed

in corrupt activities. But while Khan’s words sounded brave if not foolhardy, he is undoubtedly the most popular politician in Pakistan.

“There is no question that he and the army are on a head-on collision” said Raza Rumi, a leading Pakistani columnist. “They don’t want him back as PM and they will use all possible tricks in their bag to achieve it.”

What Khan really wants, added Rumi, is not so much to curb their meddling, but to make them support him again.

He may be in a stronger position than previous civilian challengers to the military’s authority. “We are in a totally different world – where there are 190 million mobiles in the country and his party is way ahead of the game on social media.”

Unlike previously, the army is divided – and Khan has many supporters in its lower ranks. Many believe that the army might use the unrest to declare a state of emergency, a so-called “soft coup”.

On Friday night the military tried to recapture the initiative. “General Asim Munir and the senior army leadership under him wholeheartedly support

democracy and will keep doing so,” said army spokesman Major General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry on Geo TV. “There is no question of martial law.”

None of this could be happening at a worse time. Pakistan looks set to default next month when its \$6.5 billion IMF deal expires with no sign of renewal. The rupee is at a record low after losing a third of its value against the dollar. Interest rates are at a record 21 per cent to try to curb inflation of 37 per cent.

At the same time the country is once again plagued by terrorism attacks by the Pakistan Taliban (TTP) whose members were released from jail in neighbouring Afghanistan after the Taliban took power.

“Pakistan is always in crisis but in the past we’ve had one crisis or another, never altogether like this, nor with such divisions in key institutions” says Kugelman. “It’s hard to see any hope on the horizon when, instead of focusing on the dire economic situation which should be the priority, the leaders are once again embroiled in vendettas and this ego-based fight to the bottom.”

@christinalamb



those areas. Officers on the ground had clearance to take tactical decisions without consulting headquarters to boost the agility of their response.

The 72nd Mechanised Brigade, which Syrsky used to command, otherwise known as the Black Zaporizhians, were the only armoured brigade assigned to defend the capital.

Syrsky knew they did not have the firepower to halt the full force of Russia's assault bearing down on both banks of the Dnipro through the forests of the north so he created makeshift artillery bands, armed with kit from military academies, and deployed them to defend key choke points on the entry to the capital.

On March 11, Syrsky saw lines of Russian equipment on the other side of the Irpin river just outside the suburb of Moshchun, the gateway to the capital.

"This was probably the most critical moment, when I thought, 'Well, is this really going to be it? Because taking Moshchun means entry to Kyiv,'" Syrsky recalled to The Washington Post.

With characteristic adaptability, Ukrainian special forces units burst a dam in the Irpin river with an explosion. "The water flowed and flooded the Russians, and we later found the place where the Russian marines had to throw off all their body armour and swim to stay alive," he said. After a further attempt to cross with paratroopers, the Russians fell back. The capital was saved.

"Waging war leads to victory. Full stop," Syrsky wrote last week, paraphrasing the 19th-century Prussian war-theorist Carl von Clausewitz, offering a rare glimpse at his tactical inspirations.

Syrsky, like von Clausewitz, often stresses the importance of morale, and the psychological aspects of warfare.

"Morale is one of the key differences between the two forces," said Ed Arnold, a defence analyst at the Royal United Services Unit and a former army officer.

According to British Army doctrine, "fighting power" is made up of three components, conceptual – how to fight – physical – the means to fight – and moral

President Zelensky with Colonel General Syrsky, who is leading the operation in Bakhmut. From top left, Ukrainian soldiers on the attack; with a captured Russian; and treating a wounded comrade

“Attacks were very well planned

– the ability to get people to fight. "Focusing on the ones where Ukraine is on the ascendancy and Russians are just wholly deficient ... explains why his approach has been so successful," adds Arnold.

Unity of command, and objective, is another area where Ukraine can trump the Russians, whose generals tussle with each other, Wagner Group mercenaries and Chechen warlords for primacy. The offensive in Kharkiv was an example of Syrsky playing to this simple strength, according to Arnold. "It was one of the most impressive military operations that I've seen. It almost had everything: good intelligence, good planning, they had discipline, they invested exactly where they needed to and they didn't go too far."

Ukraine made probing attacks along Russia's lengthy front line in the Kharkiv region and, when they found a weak spot, threw in troops and armour to break the line. "As soon as they were behind the lines it's difficult for the Russian forces to rally to a specific geographical point. The Russians then had a unity of command issue, the command and control was just not working and it's never worked in the east since the beginning of the invasion, really," adds Arnold.

When Ukraine, once again led by Syrsky, attacks Russia's 600-mile defensive line this summer it is likely to use a similar approach but this time the Russians have had months to dig in.

Despite this, analysts stress that defensive lines are almost useless if they are not covered by firepower. After months of attritional war in Bakhmut, Syrsky may have been aiming to exhaust Russia's.

Many Ukrainian and western observers believe the cost of defending Bakhmut has been too high. In the military academies of the future, a more rounded portrayal of Colonel General Syrsky, the only man to hold this obsolete rank in the Ukrainian armed forces, may be proffered. But for now his status in the history books is secure. "Commanders' reputations are made in war and Syrsky's already done enough to be remembered as one of the best," added Arnold.

Better lait than never: meet the not-for-profit boss saving French farmers one milk carton at a time

Peter Conradi Nantes

If you were setting out to revolutionise the French economy, selling milk might seem an odd place to start. But do not try saying that to Nicolas Chabanne.

Chabanne, 53, is the founder of C'est qui le patron? (Who's the boss?), a co-operative that has transformed the way many French people buy their milk. This year he expects to sell more than 77 million litres of the stuff, thanks to a unique business model that brings together farmers and their customers.

Its origins lie in a simple question posed seven years ago when there was a surge in the number of farmers killing themselves because of falling prices and rising costs: would consumers be prepared to pay a few more centimes a packet if they knew the extra money would go towards ensuring a living wage for struggling dairy producers?

The answer turned out to be a resounding "yes" – so much so that C'est qui le patron? now sells not just milk, but more than 20 other food products from chocolate bars to canned sardines, frozen pizzas and apple compote.

The co-operative's annual turnover has passed €100 million (£87 million) – not bad given that it has no shops or production facilities of its own, no advertising budget and a staff of only just over two dozen. But Chabanne, who likes to think out of the box – or carton – is still not satisfied. He dreams of applying his co-operative model to other sectors of the French economy. "It's all about turning consumers from passive actors to active ones," he believes. "It is a model for the future."

Chabanne was explaining his vision of a different form of capitalism as we headed aboard a high-speed TGV train from Paris to Nantes, 230 miles to the southwest, to meet one of the first farmers to sign up for the scheme.

C'est qui le patron? was born after a conversation Chabanne had in 2016 with an official from the agriculture ministry. The entrepreneur had already made a name for himself with Gueules Cassées (Ugly Mugs), a venture he set up in 2013 to sell malformed fruit and vegetables the supermarkets would not normally touch.

At the end of their conversation, talk turned to the economic crisis afflicting the dairy industry and the official wondered whether he had any suggestions to tackle it. "I asked him how much more the farmers needed for their milk: €1, €2, a few centimes?" Chabanne recalled. "He didn't know – which was a bit surprising."

So Chabanne did some research of his own and found that adding eight centimes a litre to the price they were paid would be enough to save them. Given the average French person buys 50 litres of milk per annum, this would cost each consumer a mere €4 extra per year. "For the first time we had worked out how much farmers needed to earn a living," he said.

Determined to do his bit, Chabanne went to the big dairies to encourage them to raise the prices they paid their producers, but no one was interested – so he decided to set up his own brand instead.

Rather than a conventional commercial venture, though, it is a not-for-profit co-operative: its 13,000 *sociétaires* (members), who have paid a symbolic €1 each, decide the rules, which include a bar on genetically modified feed and a requirement that cows spend at least four months of the year grazing outside. They also set the price at which the milk is sold – which is printed on the front of the pack. Currently it retails for €1.27 per litre, compared to €1.25 for a typical French commercial brand (and an

equivalent average price of €1.40 per litre in the UK).

There are no shareholders, and the seven centimes that C'est qui le patron? takes from each litre are ploughed back into the venture and used to pay Chabanne and his staff.

The first big retailer to sign up was Carrefour, to whom Chabanne was already supplying his "ugly fruit". Most – if not all – the other stores followed. "We hoped to sell five million litres; by the end of the first month we were at one million and by the end of the first year at 33 million," he said. "And all that without any advertising or a marketing budget."

The scheme has proved to be a salvation for the 3,000 or so producers who have joined – among them Régis Mainguy, 45, who together with his brother and cousin, tends 130 cows on a farm east of Nantes that has been in their family since 1873.

Since Mainguy started farming two decades ago, the dairy industry has been through a series of crises, which have reduced the number of farms in his area from 18 in 2000 to just six today. But by 2016 life had become especially tough: he

was losing 5-6 centimes on each litre of milk and, to make ends meet, was being forced to sell animals and live off the money his wife, Emmanuelle, 47, earned as a nurse.

Matters took a further turn for the worse after he gave an interview to French television in which he criticised the dairy to which he sold his milk. It responded by sending him a letter announcing it would be terminating their relationship. "They said I had denigrated their brand," he said. Other dairies also declined to take on someone they considered a troublemaker.

Chabanne got wind of Mainguy's plight and sent him a message on social media. He then paid a visit to the farm, explained how C'est qui le patron? worked and signed him up. Mainguy and his wife have not looked back since.

"It has completely changed our lives," said Emmanuelle. "I have a husband who is happy to go to work and can sleep again. We are also now working with people who have the same ideas as us, the same belief in fairness."

Chabanne attributes the success of his venture in part to its co-operative nature: others who have tried to replicate the formula elsewhere in Europe have struggled largely because they tried to do so in the form of a conventional start-up aimed at making money, he believes.

Also important is France's strong culinary tradition, which encourages people to care not just about the quality of food but also the welfare of the farmers who produce it. It is a sentiment endorsed by three local *sociétaires* who joined us on the visit. "This initiative is really admirable," said one, Léo Carvalho, 24, who is studying for a masters in business. "When we work, it is to feed ourselves, but the farmers work to feed us. It's scandalous that they should find themselves in financial trouble."

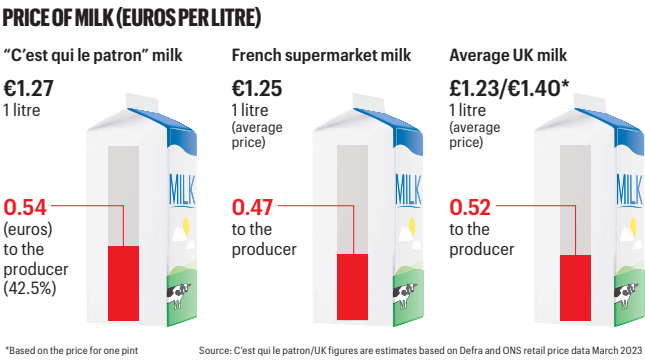
For Miguel Rehin, 45, a former nurse, the appeal is the contact between producer and consumer. "Do I really need an intermediary to buy milk that is made 50 metres away from where I live?" he asked.

So what sector does Chabanne intend to disrupt next, I wonder, as we take the train back to Paris. The answer surprises me: "Retirement homes," he replies.

In France, as elsewhere, staff are in short supply and often poorly paid, while the relatives of those who live in homes are keen to ensure they are being treated properly – all of which, he believes, would make it ripe for a co-operative model. The leap from milk to care provider seems an enormous one, but if anyone can do it, I suspect, Chabanne can.

“This has changed our lives – my husband can sleep again

Régis Mainguy, below left, was struggling to survive as a dairy farmer until he was contacted by Nicolas Chabanne



Who's Scorsese's bestfella? De Niro and DiCaprio face off on screen

Jonathan Dean

Eight years ago, Martin Scorsese directed a 16-minute advert called *The Audition*, for which he was paid a lot of money, to advertise a casino in Macau.

Proof that cinema is finally dead? Not at all. This ad – which can be found on YouTube – is a surreal, self-aware blast. It has Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio playing themselves, reportedly paid \$13 million (£10.4 million) each for two days' work.

For a long time it was also a collector's item for the director's fans: the only chance to see his two favourite leading men in a Scorsese film together.

The plot involves the actors competing for the same role in a Scorsese film, the joke being that both men claim him as their own. The competition gets testy. DiCaprio derides his rival as, "Big Bobby D", who calls the younger man "a child" – then insults his little beard. In the end, Scorsese ditches them

both and chooses Brad Pitt. *The Audition* is a silly, if surprisingly worthwhile, sell-out, which raises a question – which of the two stars is Scorsese's greatest muse?

Both actors emerged in glittering decades for film – De Niro in the 1970s, DiCaprio the 1990s. But cinema is different today and the adult movies they love to make have become rarer in an industry largely built around teen-pandering projects that feature lead characters in spandex backed by computer-generated effects.

To the rescue, then, is *Killers of The Flower Moon*: a Scorsese epic that has its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on Saturday.

It stars not only De Niro, but DiCaprio too. Adapted from David Grann's non-fiction book of the same name and set in the 1920s it concerns the serial murders of members of the Native American Osage tribe following the discovery of oil on their land in Oklahoma. The resulting investigation played a formative role in the



emergence of the FBI. The film had a \$200 million budget and runs for 3 hours 26 minutes (slightly shorter than the director's last film, *The Irishman*).

Scorsese, 80, is evidently delighted to have brought the two stars together again for such an extended run in his 27th film as director. "This is my sixth film with Leo, my tenth with De Niro, and my first with both," he has said.



Scorsese knows the significance of these icons sharing a screen, as they did for DiCaprio's breakthrough, *This Boy's Life*, by the Scottish director Michael Caton-Jones, in 1993. At the time DiCaprio really was just a boy. "I got into this business because I worked with De Niro," said DiCaprio. "I wanted to see everything that he had done and that led me to this guy called Martin Scorsese. Since

I was 16, they've been my mentors, icons, heroes."

When Scorsese works with either man, the results are often electric. Most of De Niro's credits with him roll off the tongue: *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *New York, New York*, *Raging Bull*, *King of Comedy*, *Goodfellas*, *Cape Fear*, *Casino* and *The Irishman*. "I know of nobody who can surprise me on screen the way he does," said Scorsese once. "No actor

Robert De Niro in *Taxi Driver*, Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Wolf of Wall Street* and the two together in *Killers of the Flower Moon*



comes to mind who can provide such power and excitement." About DiCaprio, he says: "Leo has a similar sensibility to me. I'm 30 years older than him, but we see the world the same way."

And while DiCaprio's collaborations – *Gangs of New York*, *The Aviator*, *The Departed*, *Shutter Island* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* – are less renowned than De Niro's, it is superb work. The pair

have between them made four films with Scorsese nominated for best picture at the Academy Awards. Only *The Departed* won. It also gave Scorsese his sole best director Oscar.

Conventional wisdom puts De Niro as the muse of choice: the mohawk of *Taxi Driver*; the slo-mo end of *Raging Bull*; even the prescience of the TV satire *King of Comedy*.

That is cinema which has

stood the test of nearly 50 years, while DiCaprio's films with Scorsese have proved more divisive.

The Wolf of Wall Street is derided as misogynistic (its defenders argue instead that it is a portrayal of misogyny), while *Gangs of New York* is often thought of as one that Harvey Weinstein botched through extensive cutting.

But DiCaprio deserves more reverence, not least because he and Scorsese are making big budget films for adults that nobody else is, as opposed to De Niro's heyday.

And DiCaprio is the one getting them made. He is an executive producer on *Killers of the Flower Moon* and the duo have *The Wager*, a naval epic, in the works.

"When you're young," Scorsese has said, "and have that first burst of energy, you make five or six pictures in a row that tell the stories of all the things in life that you want to say." DiCaprio, though, is energising Scorsese at the other end of his career – and is that not more impressive?

Erdogan’s foes on alert to stop a steal

As 60 million cast votes in Turkey, the president’s opponents are placing lawyers at every polling station to prevent fraud

LOUISE CALLAGHAN



In Istanbul

Over a breakfast of cheese, olives and bread, thousands of Turkish opposition supporters gathered across Istanbul yesterday on what they hoped would be the last day of the Erdogan era.

They are part of an army of half a million volunteers that the Turkish opposition has raised to protect perhaps the most important elections in the modern republic’s history.

As more than 60 million Turks trek to polling stations in schools across the country this morning, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is neck and neck with his main challenger, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who has brought together six opposition parties to take on the man who has run Turkey for over 20 years.

Should either win over 50 per cent of the vote, they will become president. If not, the race will go to a second round in two weeks. The latest polls showed Kilicdaroglu edging a win, with between 49 and 51 per cent.

By this evening, Turkey could have chosen a new leader. But nothing is certain. And the opposition suspects that the president and his supporters could manipulate the vote in their favour.

“There’s a big possibility of the vote being stolen,” said Aysim Kaya, 22, a fourth-year philosophy student with blonde, wavy hair, who has volunteered as an election observer for the opposition. “These are very important elections, and we need real change, so we need to be there.”

As part of the unprecedented effort to protect the vote, at least one lawyer and several volunteers will be present at each polling station to prevent irregularities, opposition officials said. They have



Supporters of opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu attend a rally in Ankara

learnt from the Istanbul mayoral elections in 2019, when Erdogan’s party, the AKP, declared victory and the opposition cried foul, ordering a recount of the polls, which they won by a sizeable margin.

That victory, they say, showed the enduring power of democracy in Turkey: a place where you can be detained if someone overhears you insulting the president on the bus, where almost all TV channels are pro-government, and where the leader of the third-biggest party is in prison, but where other opposition parties are strong, campaign

openly on the streets and have a detailed oversight of the voting process.

Erdogan has spent two decades amassing enormous power, including through a referendum that vastly increased the reach of the presidency. Campaigning efforts, rights groups say, are skewed in his favour, even without any electoral interference, due to his control over newspapers, television and the judiciary. But should he be shown to have lost at the polls, he insists that he will step down.

“We came to power with democratic means. If my nation decides otherwise, we will do what democracy requires,” Erdogan told Turkish television on Friday.

“There is no question,” said one senior figure within AKP circles, who did not wish to be named. “He won’t act like Trump or

someone like that.” The opposition are more concerned that the results could be altered during the counting process.

“We’re worried and we don’t feel trust, because of our previous experience,” said Aysemin Gulmez, a lawyer and parliamentary candidate for the CHP, Kilicdaroglu’s party, who is working on election security. She added that she hoped and believed that the vote would go ahead without interference.

AKP spokesman Omer Celik tweeted last week that elections would proceed freely and safely, adding: “Bad intentions and provocations will be answered at the ballot box.” His party did not respond to requests for comment.

But the opposition is taking nothing for granted. Volunteers have been told to

charge their phones and download a VPN in case of attempts to cut electricity or block the internet.

Ozgur Erdem, CHP regional head in the Sultanbeyli district of Istanbul, feared the ruling party would try to steal the vote. “They manipulated the elections before and we stopped them,” he said, referring to the 2019 mayoral elections, later adding: “Erdogan can do anything.”

The Turkish electoral system itself is, all parties agree, robust, with strong oversight over each part of the process. Each count from a ballot box is signed off by a board that includes civil servants and representatives from the main parties. Yet the opposition claim there are weak points, particularly in eastern Turkey, where oversight is less strict, or in the

“A party figure claims: He won’t act like Trump

areas damaged by the earthquakes in February that killed more than 50,000 people and displaced millions.

There have been worrying signs. The head of the AKP’s election affairs committee said yesterday that the president would know the results of the elections before anyone else. And on Friday, the country’s main telephone operator told its Istanbul employees that they wouldn’t be able to use their workplace at the weekend due to “technical infrastructure works”.

Erdogan, while encouraging opposition supporters to protect the ballot boxes “as we do”, warned his supporters they could face reprisals if the AKP lost.

“Do not forget,” he told a crowd last week. “You may pay a heavy price.”

To counteract the potential risks, the opposition has trained huge teams of lawyers to protect vote security.

Last week, in a conference hall on the Asian side of Istanbul, hundreds were learning the basics of election security: which ballots are invalid, what the complaints process is for violations and when to let a man with a gun enter the voting area (never, unless he is a policeman).

“We’re trying to make sure that the elections are abiding by the law,” said Riza Kocak, a CHP regional official in charge of election security. “We don’t want to turn the election to the advantage of any particular party. We just want to make sure that the results of the elections are reflected correctly.”

For many of the volunteers under the umbrella of the opposition alliance, it is a chance to help usher in a new era.

“We all know there’s something wrong with the system and we want change,” said Zeynep Yavuz, 24, a food engineering student, who signed up to be an election observer with Turkey Volunteers. “I want to be part of that change.”

@louiseelisabet
Additional reporting by Beril Eski

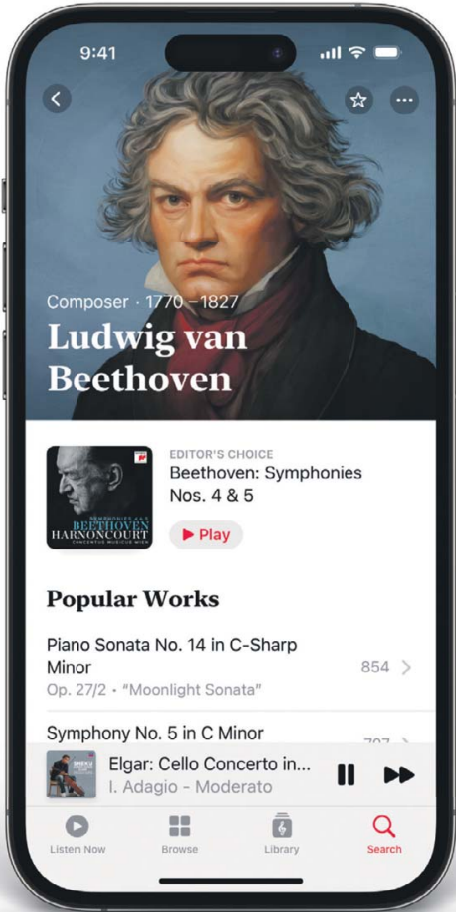
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NEWS REVIEW

The ex-president lost his sex abuse case — and is unashamed. *Selina Scott*, who once crossed him, asks why these toxic men still have so many devotees



We were flying at 35,000ft on the way from New York to his sprawling Miami estate when Donald Trump suddenly turned into the “killer” his father had instructed him to believe he must always be. The charm he had

bombarded me with for weeks was gone and the smile disappeared from his face. Instead his jaw was clenched with anger. “I am gonna get that woman,” he said venomously. “Watch me.”

He was talking about Barbara Walters, the million-dollar-a-year star broadcaster on American TV who had interviewed him and exposed how his empire was built on debt. He couldn’t let it go. This was in the 1990s after Trump’s publicity team had successfully built his image as the most dynamic new businessman in Manhattan. Walters, much admired by the American public, a friend of presidents, was, of course, untouchable even though he tried to denigrate her professionally and personally. It is this same visceral hatred of women who won’t do his bidding that Trump has unleashed on the journalist E Jean Carroll, who won her civil suit against him last week in New York.

During Trump’s presidency in 2019, Carroll accused him in an article in New York magazine of sexually assaulting her at the Bergdorf Goodman department store in New York in late 1995 or early 1996. She was 52 at the time and he was 49. Carroll said he had asked her for help buying a gift for a woman and they ended up in the lingerie section. After joking about trying on a lacy bodysuit, they ended up in a dressing room together. “The moment the dressing-room door is closed, he lunges at me, pushes me against the wall, hitting my head quite badly, and puts his mouth against my lips,” she wrote.

Over the next three minutes, Carroll claims that Trump, still fully dressed, undid his flies, forced his fingers around her “private area” and raped her. The jury in the civil case found that Trump was liable for sexually abusing Carroll, but not raping her, and awarded the writer a total of £4 million in damages which includes compensation for defamation, after he accused her of making up the claims.

It’s no surprise that Trump called Carroll a “whack job” on CNN last week. The verdict will have incensed him. He can never be seen to lose, especially to a woman.

Trump is an old-fashioned misogynist; the details of his deposition that were read out in court confirm it. When Carroll’s lawyers asked him about his notorious “grab them by the pussy” quote, which emerged during the 2016 election campaign, Trump responded: “Well historically that’s true with stars ... it’s largely true, fortunately or unfortunately.” He probably thought that Carroll was too old and inconsequential to be taken seriously.

For years she had remained mute about the attack because she felt “ashamed”. Like many victims of assault she believed that somehow she had allowed this to happen. But inspired by the MeToo movement she decided to go public and was immediately sacked by her employer, Elle magazine, a women’s publication that should have championed her. Whether levers were pulled to drive her out we will never know.

I have some knowledge of Trump and his tactics. My 60-minute documentary on him for ITV in 1995 exposed him as a stranger to the truth. The exposé came about accidentally as the result of a cam-

JAMES COWEN FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES



WHY DOESN'T SLEAZE STICK TO TEFLON DON?

“He told me: You are no longer hot”

era malfunction. I had completed a marathon interview with him at Mar-a-Lago when, to my horror, I was told that the camera we were using had mysteriously switched from colour to black and white and the film was unusable. I had to return and ask him for another interview.

This time around he gave me a different breakdown of the financial structure of his company, telling me, for example, that he owned 40 per cent of the Empire State Building, when he had bragged in the first interview that he owned 100 per cent. Back in Britain we discovered there had in fact been no malfunction, and what we were left with was gold dust.

We broadcast the two contradictory clips side by side to the music *It Ain't Necessarily So*.

Trump was furious when the interview aired in Britain and libelled me to such an extent that I was forced to warn him that I would take legal action if he didn't stop. According to him I went from being the “legendary Selina Scott” (his words) to “obnoxious, repetitive, not at all very smart”, adding, “As many people know, you are not a first-class reporter, you have little talent, you are no longer hot, totally uptight, insecure.”

His lawyers then put the frighteners on ITV as it was preparing to sell the show to

NBC in America for airing coast to coast, and it has never been broadcast again.

I didn't get rid of Trump so easily. He pestered me for months after his bad-mouthing of me, sending handwritten letters boasting about himself and his achievements. It felt perverted, as though he wanted me to be interested.

It now transpires that this was the tip of the iceberg. Carroll is one of a number of women who have come forward with allegations against him in the ensuing years.

There have been 25 claims of assault or inappropriate behaviour in total, all of which he denies. They tend to relate to

“The appeal may be more primal”

alleged incidents in New York or at Mar-a-Lago, and usually follow a formula. Yet Trump ploughs on, apparently unscathed. “My poll numbers just came out – they went up,” Trump boasted last week. While there is no evidence to support this statement yet, his popularity has tended to surge whenever scandal hits. Why doesn't any of it stick?

Trump's casual misogyny has made him a figure to be championed by inadequate men. They view him as a liberating figure. He does and says much that many men wish they could say and do.

Throughout my 40 years in broadcasting I met many Trump wannabes; senior executives who couldn't bear the ascension of women through the ranks. They didn't like women as competition and they showed it by suggesting that we ought to dress a certain way and be grateful for their attention. These feelings have intensified in the intervening years as women have become more strident in their demands for equality.

A younger poster boy for these same inadequates is the influencer Andrew Tate, who is now in Romania, charged with rape and trafficking women. Another man who is openly derogatory towards women, both demean their appearance and hide it behind “traditional” views. Like Trump he has built up a vast fan base online.

More troubling perhaps is the women who vote for Trump – those who read stories like Carroll's and support him all the same. Some claim the appeal is economic; they liked his tax breaks. Others say they like that he talks tough on immigration. I think the appeal may be more primal. He is perceived to be loud and proud, sure of his own mind and when he wants a young woman he goes out and gets her. A bad boy for sure, and it appears a lot of women like that in a man even now.

It is a phenomenon that is particularly pronounced in politics. You can see traces of it in the brazen philandering of Bill Clinton and Boris Johnson, whose behaviour shows a flagrant disregard, not just for their wives, but for women. Why do they go on to win elections? Because charisma is a potent force in politics; it casts an intoxicating spell.

Trump is also machiavellian; and much of what he does can be seen as a power game. While women such as the porn star Stormy Daniels and pliable Playboy models seem to be his preferred bedmates, Trump is also strongly drawn towards women in the media; intelligent females with a high profile whom he believes he can charm into doing his bidding. He likes to pit his personality against theirs, believing he is so irresistible that he will win. When it doesn't work he turns his guns on them as he once did on me, and once he holds a grudge that anger can burn for years.

That is why Carroll's bravery and determination are remarkable. She will know, like I do, that not only will Trump appeal but as an act of vengeance will do whatever he can to delay or avoid paying her the £4 million, awarded for damaging her reputation by branding her a liar. Think of the courage it required to take her case to court, to reveal the details of what happened in that dressing room. Her actions are inspiring and I believe that they will encourage more women to come forward.

HATE MAIL AND LOST JOBS: LIFE OF AN ACCUSER

As the journalist E Jean Carroll left court last week after the ruling against Donald Trump, a woman shouted: “You are so brave and beautiful!” “Thank you so much,” Carroll replied, beaming.

Across town, another woman was smiling — and jumping around, and crying a little: Natasha Stoyanoff, a writer who had given evidence at the trial. In 2005, when Stoyanoff was working at

People magazine, she went to Mar-a-Lago to interview Trump and his new wife Melania. As she tells it, he offered to show her around the mansion while Melania, then pregnant, changed outfits. In one of the rooms, she said, Trump closed the door, pushed her against a wall and forced his tongue down her throat.

She was stunned by his speed as much as by the sheer weight of his body; then Trump's butler came in and said it was time to resume the interview.

For Stoyanoff, 58, Tuesday's verdict feels unreal. “Especially when it's something that has

been on your mind for years,” she said.

Despite the misconduct claims against Trump over the years he hadn't been pinned down in court. “All of us — the women who came out about Trump — have been called liars by him and his fans for seven years or so,” Stoyanoff said. With Carroll's success, she believes it has been officially decided:



Natasha Stoyanoff, left, and Karena Virginia say they were sexually assaulted by Trump

“They are telling the truth.” Stoyanoff went public in 2016, as did a number of other alleged victims. A few were inspired to speak out by the leaked Access Hollywood tape, in which Trump boasted he could grab women “by the pussy”. He was elected a few weeks later, but for his accusers there was constant abuse (both on and offline), death threats, lost work, severed friendships. And even when the #MeToo movement blew up a year or so

later, the alleged Trump victims were rarely at the heart of the conversation. Stoyanoff counts herself lucky, because by 2016 she had returned to her native Canada, where she was believed and supported.

It was different for Karena Virginia, who also came forward in 2016 but lived in a Trump-supporting part of New Jersey and wasn't so lucky. A former model,



she says she encountered Trump in 1998 when he approached her outside the US Open in New York, commented on her legs to some men near by, put his arm around her and groped her breast.

Now a 52-year-old yoga teacher, Virginia lives in New Jersey with her husband and two children. She says that coming forward took a brutal toll. Her son was bullied at school. She lost friends and started to dread opening the mailbox because of hate mail.

Virginia wants to celebrate Carroll's courage but is depressed “so many people in the country that I love so much believe [Trump] is innocent”. She believes the verdict will have a positive impact for women, but adds: “I just don't think that his supporters can hear the truth.”

My best pal is going blind — but we still won a 16,000km race across Canada

Two women who met on the first day of school fought health problems and did odd jobs to land a £20,000 prize, writes *Caroline Scott*

With their arms wrapped around each other protectively and hands clasped tight, life-long friends Cathie Rowe, 50, and Tricia Sail, 49, romped home with the £20,000 prize when the third series of BBC1's Bafta-winning *Race Across the World* reached a nail-biting conclusion on Wednesday night. The show, which pits couples in a race against time, is in its third series and the viewing figures have never been so high.

More than 3.1 million people tuned in to see them

beat the married doctors Zainib, 32, and Mobeen, 31, and the father and daughter Monique, 25, and Ladi, 52, to the finish line in St John's, Newfoundland, Canada's most easterly city. They had covered 16,000km overland from Vancouver in 51 days.

In the show each couple is given the cash value of a plane ticket (£2,498.13, roughly £50 a day) to travel by road, rail or sea. With no smartphone, internet access or credit cards they have to rely on ingenuity and, often, the kindness of strangers.

The success of the series owes much to the bond

between the couples. They cleaned up dog poo, instructed diners how to eat lobster, scrubbed lavatories and worked in a hair salon in the face of extraordinary personal challenges.

“We are very tactile. The hand-holding is reassurance,” Rowe says. “But it's also because Cathie is my guide,” explains Sail, who has an autoimmune disorder which causes “birdshot” uveitis, a degenerative condition where spots appear on the retina. “If you imagine looking through wet cling film covered in marker pen — that's what I can see. You could be a person or you could be a bus. Cathie instinctively walks beside me saying: step, tree root.”

The pair met on Rowe's first

day at Penglais School in Aberystwyth when they were 13. They lost touch in 1990 but reconnected almost 17 years later on the website Friends Reunited. Rowe has two grown-up sons and runs pharmacies with her husband Gareth in Bridgend. Sail works for the sight-loss charity RNIB in Exeter and is married to Matt, a police supervisor who also has serious health issues.

The friends used to meet in the middle every six weeks but

Cathie Rowe, on left, and Tricia Sail

had to stop when Sail's eyesight deteriorated. They speak on the phone every day.

Their application for the TV show started when Sail asked: “Do you fancy doing something bonkers?” Rowe instantly agreed

“because after the stress of keeping our staff safe through Covid I wanted an adventure, but mainly to support Trish”.

They got off to a bad start when they got lost in Vancouver's Stanley Park for 5½ hours on the first day. “I said if it's going to be this hard, I don't want to carry on,” Sail says. “It was so demoralising.” Later, she struggled on an eight-minute cable car ride high above Banff, “incoherent with fear”.

Rowe felt “a bit of a niggler” seven weeks in, “hitching lifts with strangers for nine hours — I was totally out of my comfort zone”.

But viewers watched them



work together to overcome all obstacles. Secretly, the pair strategised, putting money aside each week for the final push. “We ate a lot of crackers and cream cheese,” explains Rowe. In one of the funniest scenes, the pair get tipsy on gin while working in an artisan distillery in Antigonish, Nova Scotia.

Off screen, their partners are good friends. One of the most heartrending scenes was when Sail found out Matt's kidney transplant had failed. “I spoke to Matt on the phone for a couple of minutes and he said, ‘If you come home, I'm going to divorce you,’” she said. Matt, who is back on dialysis, has since had both legs amputated, but Sail says he is doing well.

The trip has given Sail the

confidence to leave her “draining” job as a bank clerk. “I thought, sod this. I've been chopping logs, building outhouses and frying chips. I can do anything.” She now helps others to cope with sight loss.

The friends are determined to carry on travelling. They have already trekked to Machu Picchu in Peru and are planning to walk the Great Wall of China together. “People have asked: what have you learned about each other? Well, nothing really,” Rowe says. “It just confirmed what we already knew. Trish is my best friend.”

Sail describes Rowe as “the tonic to my gin ... We now know conclusively that when we grow old disgracefully, we're going to be fine.”

CHRIS RADBURN



Get off our land, Tories ... how the countryside went from blue to green

The Green Party is surging in the shires due to anger over new homes, solar farms and the state of our rivers. Rural politics has never been so unpredictable, say *Ben Spencer* and *Hugo Daniel*

Julie Wearing is worried. “People want to preserve the countryside and common land,” says the 64-year-old, from the village of Stowupland near Stowmarket. That is why, after a lifetime of voting Conservative, Wearing decided to give her vote to the Green Party at the local elections this month.

It was the first time she’d voted for them and she wasn’t the only one switching allegiances. In the vote on May 4, the Greens won Mid Suffolk district council from the Conservatives, taking 24 of the 34 seats and securing their first ever majority-held council in the UK. It was the biggest wave in a national tidal surge of rural support for the party. The Greens doubled their councillors nationally from 240 to 481 – and became the largest party in East Hertfordshire and Lewes in East Sussex. They also took 12 seats in East Suffolk, and made gains in Cumberland, South Tyneside, Hastings and Worcester.

In the past the Greens have performed best in university cities such as Brighton and Bristol. They’ve had success in Stroud, a green heartland of sorts, and acquired power as part of a coalition in 2012. But this foray into the countryside is unprecedented. About three-quarters of the Greens’ gains across the country were taken from the Tories.

“If they’re not panicking in Conservative Campaign Headquarters, then they ought to be,” says Peter Franklin, a former Tory policy adviser.

Wearing voted Green to protect her village from builders. “Stowupland has had

loads of redevelopment, we’ve got three or four building sites gone up, so we virtually meet Stowmarket now. That’s a major reason [for the switch] – to preserve the country way of life.”

John Caston, 74, shares many of her concerns. “This land’s been farmed for generations,” Caston says, sitting on his tractor in the village of Somersham. Caston remains a loyal Tory. For him the Greens are less a rural salvation and more an incoming threat. “One is wary certainly, because you see the people that are getting elected and you think, ‘Well, what the hell do they know?’”

Caston’s arable farm has been run by his family since 1950. “I think a lot of the Greens are unfairly very anti-farming and I find that preposterous really,” he says. He points to the proliferation of large solar farms in the area. “Nearly all these

In Mid Suffolk, the Greens – under farmer Andy Mellen, below – won majority control of the party’s first district council



things haven’t been thought through. The thing is really most farmers want to be left alone to farm,” he says. “They don’t need shepherding by someone in London interfering and telling us what to do and giving us loads of paperwork.”

This exemplifies the tension that has been building for years in the British countryside: a conflict between modernity and traditionalism, between creeping suburban sensibilities and entrenched rural conservatism, between environmentalism and pastoralism. Some blame the “woke” meddlers who want to hand fertile farmland back to nature in the name of “rewilding”, others a politically correct tickbox culture or the faceless bureaucrats at Defra.

Only last week 1,200 acres of farmland near Abergwesyn, in Powys, Wales, was bought by a steel manufacturer aiming to plant trees to offset its carbon emissions. “It’s impossible for farmers to compete,” Philip Arrowsmith, a local sheep farmer, told Farmers Weekly.

The Tories – in government for the past 13 years – are increasingly blamed by a constituency which once would have automatically given them its vote. As the former cricketer and self-proclaimed countryside champion Lord Botham of Ravensworth forecast last year: “Until there is a bonfire of regulations, the Conservatives will keep getting burnt at the ballot box.”

But how is it that the Greens – a party of radical protest and urban liberalism – have benefited from this rural disillusionment?

Andy Mellen, the leader of the Greens in Mid Suffolk, offers a clue. This is no dreadlocked hippy, but a 55-year-old farmer, born and bred locally, married for 34 years with three grown-up children. “I look across our 24 councillors, we’ve got small businessmen, lawyers, teachers, local government people – a

“**If they’re not panicking in Tory HQ, then they ought to be**

whole range,” he says. Greens have differentiated themselves from Conservatives in the area by opposing large housing developments. “Bacton, one of the villages I represent, was deemed to be a sustainable location for development because it had a bus service,” he says. “So 440 houses were approved, but the bus operator pulled the service down to once a week, and the houses are still coming.”

What about solar farms, a source of anxiety locally? Mellen backs the need for renewable energy, but adds: “There is a visceral tension between farming for food and farming for energy. We need to preserve the best and most versatile farmland for food production, and we need to localise food production. We don’t support solar farms en masse.” They prefer panels on rooftops rather than farmland. This is backed up by his group’s voting record. A recent application for a 35-hectare solar farm near Somersham was blocked by two Green councillors on the planning committee, who sided with four Tories against one Green who supported the plan.

Mellen acknowledges that his group has benefited from disillusionment with the Tories nationally but also says the Greens have built local support incrementally, winning their first seat in 2003 and gradually gaining the trust of voters. And they have been organised.

Rachel Turner, 57, who works in a shop in Stowmarket, says: “The Greens are very visible, they are around and do things ... that makes a big difference.” Turner cites litter-picking and traffic reduction measures as Green wins.

Robert Ford, professor of political science at Manchester University, says: “The Greens have learnt a trick from the Lib Dems of the 1990s and 2000s. They were chameleons and adopted whatever set of colours fitted best with their local environment. So they ran well to the left of Labour in urban areas, and elsewhere to the right of the Conservatives, particularly on development issues.”

But the ability of the Greens to attract votes from urban radicals and rural conservatives alike has only been made possible by the fact that environmental issues are increasingly mainstream.

Luke Tryl, UK director of More in Common and a former Tory special adviser, says: “A consensus on climate runs across all social segments. It doesn’t mean that they all love Extinction Rebellion – but when it comes to the need to take action on climate, it is really striking the extent to which they agree, and they will approach it from slightly different angles.” For rural Tories, he says, the focus is often the natural environment.

Josh Simons, director of Labour Together – a think tank known to be close to Sir Keir Starmer – says headlines about water pollution have been a turning point for many in the countryside. “The Tories have been the party of sewage in the rivers, they have done a really bad job on environmental degradation.” For Tory voters who would never vote Labour, the Greens are an increasingly palatable choice. Simons says these issues are connected by a nagging sense of “insecurity” about the environment – whether it is sewage, litter in parks in red wall seats, or uncontrolled housing estates in East Anglia. “Whichever party nails the message that connects those wins the next election, in my opinion.”

But will the Green surge translate into an increased vote at the general election? Robert Pyke, 86, a former farmer and engineer who has lived in Stowmarket for 35 years, says: “I’ve been voting Green for ages, simply and solely on the basis of local government. They’re more visible. I used to know the candidate and we were on fairly the same wavelength. But I think the Green Party as a national party is a load of nonsense.”

What university students really need to study: how to disagree

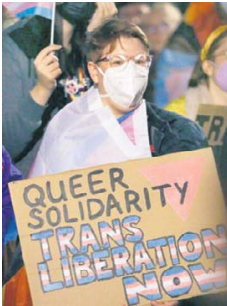
Simon Fanshawe, a co-founder of Stonewall, faced walkouts and heckling when he spoke at Cambridge on free speech. He says parents and education leaders must stop indulging intolerance

Last week I spoke at Cambridge University on “the power of difference”. It was “an exploration of how human difference lies at the heart of a university, and of our ability to create spaces that are safe for disagreement and debate”.

With an irony they didn’t seem to spot, a small rabble stood in the street outside the auditorium of Gonville & Caius College for almost the whole two hours and banged drums, screamed and chanted. Inside, David Runciman, the history professor and presiding chairman, kicked off the debate by inviting those who disagreed to speak up. Instead a few students who were masked flamboyantly walked out, draped in the transgender flag, and joined the crowd outside.

Despite having been one of the six co-founders of Stonewall in the late 1980s I am now apparently “totally transphobic” according to one demonstrator. Jacqui Gavin, a trans woman with whom I have agreed and disagreed in a way that interests us both, had agreed

“**The left thinks it’s always right. The right never says it’s wrong**



Protesters at Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge

to be my respondent on the night. But to these activists we are the wrong kind of gay and the wrong kind of trans.

They did not succeed in cancelling us. Against the odds the discussion was lively, full of humour and at times awkward, frank and quite adversarial.

Attempts to disrupt intellectual exchange are commonplace now in higher education, as Professor Kathleen Stock is discovering with the “Stop Stock” campaign in relation to her imminent appearance at the Oxford Union. According to the junior common room at Christ Church she is a “notorious transphobe”. A hater of trans people? No. She just disagrees with the activists and maintains that sex is binary and immutable.

How has this come about? Not just with students but also in the flaccid leadership of universities? When I asked the master of Gonville & Caius to ensure our safety and ability to speak, she sent me the “college statement on freedom of speech”. But she left it to the porters to handle security, saying that any statement by her risked “exaggerating the divisions caused by this event”. What divisions? Apart from of opinion?

But this is not just about universities or gender ideology. It is a symptom of something wider in society. On too many issues, a vehement minority refuse to hear opposing views and also insist on operating their heckler’s veto over what anyone else can discuss.

There is a narcissism to this lack of debate. At Cambridge, despite the topic being about academic freedom and creating spaces that are safe for discussion – not from it – the trans activists managed to make it

about them. Many conversations about discrimination and the experiences of black people are now transformed into discussions about white people and how guilty they feel about racism and about their “privilege”. Tackling the epidemic of violence against women has become a boo-hoo fest for men who say “but it’s not every man”.

We are caught in an age of political egocentricity, of hyperindividualism, where who I am matters more than who we are. People begin sentences with the phrase “As a ...” – as a woman, or as a gay man – to justify what they are about to say on the basis of who they are, not what they think. They characterise their views as being so central to their identity that disagreement is “debating my existence”, as the trans activists would have it.

Those who operate like this demand total agreement. Kate Forbes who ran for the leadership of the SNP, said she disagreed with gay marriage and abortion. But, despite having no desire to roll them back and also putting forward credible plans for independence and the economy, the social media mob just dismissed her wholesale as a bigot.

Good politics doesn’t work like that. Change comes by creating coalitions across the centre and marginalising the extremes. What is happening now is that the extremes are marginalising the centre. I have always been struck by the political maturity of those from whom I learned so much in the Stonewall campaigns. Their aim was not only to eliminate discrimination but also to create a platform from which lesbian and gay people could contribute to a society in which everyone could live freely. The aim of activists now is not to find the right solutions for the greater good but to point the demonising finger and bask in the sunshine of feeling correct. Accusations are enough. They define the crime, find the accused guilty and mete out social sanction in one sentence – without the need to prove or even argue their case.

Social progress has become a question of personal fulfilment, individual wellbeing has replaced the wider common good and the 1970’s dictum has been reversed; the political has become personal. Disagreement is no longer the celebration of human difference, but vaunted as righteous hostility to evil. The left thinks it is always right and the right never admits it is wrong.

The Policy Institute at King’s College London last year published results of a significant survey in universities which revealed that 67 per cent of students said they had held back on expressing their opinions because they feared what others might think of them.

Difficult as it is, and people are losing jobs and work for doing so, we need to stand up for the reality that there are different views on many of these key social controversies. We need to seek out others at work, or among friends, who think as we do – not to try and impose our view but to bang the drum for the fundamental importance of debate. Middle-class parents need to stop kow-towing to their children’s fashionable opinions and challenge schools which teach only one view of history or gender or race.

University leaders need to say and go on saying publicly that their No 1 value is that “we disagree well”. They need to create conditions for the exploration and exchange of ideas to demonstrate that this lies at the heart of education. Unless they do, the public may begin to wonder why we are lending students £9,000 a year to put their fingers in their ears and shout down others.

The Power of Difference by Simon Fanshawe is out now

Twenty’s not plenty for drivers, as Welby knows

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the latest to fall foul of Britain’s 20mph zones. It’s harder than you’d think to keep to the limit, writes *Liz Edwards*

You think a week is a long time in politics? Check out the Anglican church. Only eight days ago, before a global audience of millions, its head was handing a jewelled blade to the new King, bidding him “with this sword do justice”.

On Friday, it emerged that the same guy had himself been on the receiving end of the King’s justice, having been caught speeding. The change in fortunes could only have been swifter had he hit 26mph rather than 25mph in that 20mph zone. How the mitre has fallen.

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was penalised for exceeding the speed limit en route to Lambeth Palace – £510 in fines, victim surcharge and

READERS’ POLL

This week’s question:
Are 20mph speed limits a good idea?
Have your say at [sundaytimes.co.uk/poll](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk/poll)

automatics, but manual cars just aren’t designed to dribble along like that.

Not that temptation has anything to do with it, if you haven’t even seen the signs that the good old 30mph doesn’t apply. In September, Wales will become the first UK nation to make 20mph the default limit in urban areas.

The move might have exercised Welsh Conservatives, who dismissed it as “ludicrous”, but it will at least take a lot of the guesswork out of driving. There’s a road near me that is definitely 30mph in one stretch, and definitely 20mph in another, but comes with a mysterious section in the middle that could be either. You’ll have seen the same thing where you live. Perhaps there’s a 20 painted at some point on the tarmac.

Maybe, if you squint, you can just make out a red circle attached to a lamp post. The car behind you could be sitting on your bumper

because its driver hasn’t seen the signs. But perhaps they’re tailgating because the limit’s gone back up to 30mph without you realising. Sorry! Forgive us our trespasses.

If we’re going to turn the other cheek we should acknowledge that stats on the safety-enhancing impact of a lower speed limit are so widely available they’re hard to argue with.

Even so, when the Labour MP Rachael Maskell suggested that councils introduce speed limits of 10mph in residential areas, a Tory spokesman told The Daily Telegraph the idea was “bonkers”. The preservation of human life aside, it is tempting to wonder whether the 20mph limit isn’t also a good moneyspinner for the authorities.



Justin Welby was fined after driving at 25mph on his way to Lambeth Palace

Give us this day our daily bread and all that. Between the confusing signage and the superhuman effort it takes to maintain pootle velocity, it’s hardly surprising that drivers will transgress. By the time the green smily electronic face has turned red and disappointed-looking, it’s too late – as Welby found out.

Rather like the “get out of purgatory” indulgences the Catholic church flogged in the 16th century, speed awareness courses are a paid-for alternative to a fine.

But what about the Archbishop? A representative told me Welby “tried to pay the fine three times. He has all the paperwork to prove that he has tried to pay. Admin errors seem to be causing problems.” Oh admin errors, is it? Very “God ate my homework”. He’ll just have to remain the primate who put the rev into Right Reverend.



My dream cruise... dodging pirates

After reporting from Ukraine, our war correspondent *Christina Lamb* was due a relaxing holiday. But an African voyage proved to be almost as hair-raising

We were on the flight to Luanda in Angola, dreaming of the luxury cruise we were about to join and idly leafing through newspapers, when a small story in The Times caught my eye. “Crew trapped in safe room after pirates attack ship,” was the headline, describing the storming of a boat off the Congolese port of Pointe Noire and referring to the Gulf of Guinea as the world’s most dangerous shipping route. “Isn’t that where we’re going?” I asked my husband.

My day job for this paper is as a war correspondent but this was supposed to be a holiday, even if with rather an unusual itinerary including Congo, Gabon, Sao Tome, Benin and Togo. “Unspoilt wilds of south-west Africa” was the trip’s name. The brochure cover showed a photo of an elephant. We never did see any elephants – indeed, we barely saw any wildlife. Instead of beach walks and kayaking through mangrove swamps, we found ourselves on Russian-made Congolese military helicopters flown *Apocalypse Now*-style over dense jungle. We would see oil rigs, dictatorships, ghosts of old slave routes and a new enslavement – debt to China, which is encroaching across Africa.

Our home for 13 nights was the SH Vega. Greeted with champagne, we tried to ignore the razor wire around its back and sides. Our cabin was well designed with plenty of storage, a balcony, a TV and a crackling fake fire – the ship is designed for polar expeditions. Its new cruises from Cape Town to Tenerife makes use of its annual repositioning from the South Pole to the North.

The staff, mainly Filipino, were delightful; the drinks were free, as was an endless supply of food; and this being a boutique cruise, there were only just over 100 passengers. There were glamorous Brazilians; a Bollywood mogul; a group of gay American men; some designer-clad Italians; a Georgian oligarch and his wife; country collectors who saw this as an opportunity to notch up seven hard-to-reach nations; and the ship’s godmother Patrizia Zito, the wife of the chief executive of Swan Hellenic. There was a buzz of excitement that we would “see what others don’t” as the company motto has it. We had no idea...

Day one was a sea day – a chance for Captain Lyuba, a languid Bulgarian with a soft singsong voice, to show off his high-tech bridge with its iceberg-spotting computers. “Here the biggest threat is pirates,” he blithely told us.

Aboard the first cruise ever to dock at Pointe Noire, we woke the next morning to be greeted by dancers, dignitaries and reporters. A police escort led our buses through the sprawling city. Locals seemed less than friendly – maybe there is not much to smile about in a country that (apart from a brief gap) has had the same ruler since 1979 and where rampant



his president had spent more than \$100,000 on one pair but I bit my journalist’s tongue as we needed his air power.

My husband, Paulo, and I were on the first helicopters. It had no seatbelts and there were so many people piled in, plastic chairs had been brought on board.

Reader, had this been an assignment, I would probably have thought it foolhardy to fly. But this was a holiday, even if it was descending into a real-life version of *Triangle of Sadness* – the Oscar-nominated comedy about a luxury cruise that goes horribly wrong.

Once again there was a welcome party. The deputy mayor, who seemed sceptical that our Zodiacs could ever have landed on what it transpired was a surfers’ beach, drove us to HELP Congo, a project to rescue orphaned chimps. On a mangrove island we watched two males feeding. One got bored and threw a large aubergine at us.



After another day at Pointe Noire, everyone was relieved to leave for Gabon, another oil-rich west African dictatorship, this time run by the Bongos.

We were headed for South Loango – the trip’s other highlight, “the Eden of Africa” described in Swan Hellenic’s brochure as “an untamed wilderness” that was not only home to gorillas, elephants and leopards, but also surfing hippos.

Once again Conrad set off early on the Zodiac. Once again the answer came back no – it was not safe. We were all starting to wonder if any of this had been checked out. That Swan Hellenic motto “see what others don’t” emblazoned everywhere seemed like a bad joke. Once again Mrs Zito saved the day by making some calls and found a beach club opposite Libreville, the capital, with a floating jetty so our Zodiacs could land the next morning.

Frankly, it was not the most beautiful spot but we tried to be excited. Back on board, the ship’s windows had been blacked out and a water cannon rigged up. That night we sailed with no lights. We were heading through peak pirate waters.

Our next destination was the island of Sao Tome, a former Portuguese colony so remote that the weekly air transport used to be known as the Day of St Plane.

It still feels like a land that time forgot and things looked up as we set off to tour its lush countryside. Stunning and friendly, it seemed to be celebrating national washing day, everyone out scrubbing their smalls. Once the world’s biggest cacao producer, it had plantations with their own schools and hospitals. Now they are mostly abandoned – we visited one that looked like a film set, the air smelling of chocolate.

By now it was clear there were several cruises going on at once. We noticed some people were doing their excursions and the next day we joined a group at the restaurant Roca Sao Joao dos Angolares for a sublime tasting menu concocted by Joao Carlos Silva, an island chef who has his own programme on Portuguese TV. Our Georgian oligarch made sure the wine flowed, calling for toasts on everything from friendship to

different nations coming together. If Sao Tome is a hidden gem, its small sister island, Principe, is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen, with a real lost-world vibe, mystical green hills, forested down to white sands and turquoise waters.

We were sun-kissed and well-stocked with chocolate to deal with a slightly nervy mood as we departed. We were to rendezvous with a Nigerian military boat, which would escort us for the next day – it made for some interesting holiday snaps.

Some passengers who took a bridge tour spotted a note asking our crew to look out for a ship that had been attacked by pirates two days earlier and disappeared.

When I felt the boat rocking in the early morning, I thought: that’s it, the pirates.

In fact, we were docking at Cotonou in Benin – far more developed than Gabon and Congo, even without their oil wealth. As someone obsessed by what women do in war, I was delighted to see a towering bronze statue, 30m high, honouring the legendary female warriors who protected the kingdom of Dahomey.

Apart from Principe, my highlight of the cruise was our afternoon on a motorboat on Lake Nokoue, put-putting around Ganvie, a village on stilts. Founded by people fleeing slave traders, the name means “we are saved”. Now 30,000 people live there, many of whom seemed to be out on paddleboats selling food, fishing or ferrying children home from school.

Our last day was a significant one for my husband. Some spend their 60th in Paris or New York – his was in Togo, where he was congratulated both by a local king and a voodoo priest.

Back home I spoke to a maritime security expert who could not believe a cruise travelled through these waters. “A cruise ship of 100 wealthy white people?” he exclaimed. “That’s a pirate’s jackpot!”

Swan Hellenic specialises in polar expeditions and I have to believe those are much more organised than this, which was a first and no doubt will be tweaked for the future. Andrea Zito, CEO of Swan Hellenic, says: “Expedition cruising is never an exact science; changes to the itinerary do happen due to circumstances beyond our control.”

But did we have a good time? It was amazing. We made friends for life, we came back a little plumper and what a story we have to tell. See what others don’t? We certainly did.



Christina Lamb and her husband Paulo, pictured above drinking in the scenery from the ship, were taken to a chimp sanctuary via a military helicopter without any seatbelts, below left

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLERS

GENERAL HARDBACKS				Last week	Weeks in top 10
1	 Ultra-Processed People Chris van Tulleken (Cornerstone Press £22) An investigation into the history, science and economics of highly processed food (4,965)	—	1		
2	The Future of Geography / <i>Tim Marshall</i> (Elliott & Thompson £20) How the new geopolitical space race could revolutionise life on Earth (4,330)	—	1		
3	Bringing Down Goliath / <i>Jolyon Maugham</i> (WH Allen £22) The founder of Good Law Project on fighting back against the rich and powerful (2,990)	—	1		
4	Surviving to Drive / <i>Guenther Steiner</i> (Bantam £20) An all-access account of the 2022 season from the Haas F1 team principal (2,535)	1	2		
5	The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse Charlie Mackesy (Ebury Press £16.99) An illustrated fable containing gentle life philosophy (2,470)	2	173		
6	Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before? Julie Smith (M Joseph £16.99) Clinical psychologist's advice for navigating life's ups and downs (1,915)	4	60		
7	Spare / <i>Prince Harry</i> (Bantam £28) The Duke of Sussex's experiences as a member of the royal family (1,860)	5	16		
8	The Full English / <i>Stuart Maconie</i> (HarperNorth £20) An exploration of national identity and its evolution over the past century (1,395)	10	2		
9	How Westminster Works... and Why It Doesn't Ian Dunt (Weidenfeld £18.99) The British political system is put under the microscope (1,330)	3	3		
10	Menopausal / <i>Davina McCall and Naomi Potter</i> (HQ £22) Exploring the science and debunking damaging myths of the menopause (1,110)	11	26		

GENERAL PAPERBACKS				Last week	Weeks in top 10
1	 Atomic Habits James Clear (Random House £17.99) The minuscule changes that can grow into life-altering outcomes (3,350)	2	88		
2	Comedy, Comedy, Comedy, Drama / <i>Bob Odenkirk</i> (Coronet £10.99) The Better Call Saul actor on his career in comedy and showbusiness (3,195)	1	3		
3	Femina / <i>Janina Ramirez</i> (WH Allen £10.99) The Middle Ages through the stories of women erased from historical records (2,535)	3	5		
4	Surrounded by Idiots / <i>Thomas Erikson</i> (Vermilion £10.99) How understanding personality types can improve human interaction (2,075)	5	42		
5	The Daughter of Auschwitz / <i>Tova Friedman and Malcolm Brabant</i> (Quercus £8.99) One of the youngest people to emerge from Auschwitz tells her story (1,680)	—	1		
6	The Stable Boy of Auschwitz / <i>Henry Oster and Dexter Ford</i> (Octopus £8.99) Caring for horses gives a young boy the strength to survive the unimaginable (1,630)	4	3		
7	Becoming Molly-Mae / <i>Molly-Mae Hague</i> (Ebury Spotlight £8.99) The social media influencer and former Love Island star on her life thus far (1,495)	—	1		
8	The Traitor of Colditz / <i>Robert Verkaik</i> (Welbeck £9.99) British officers try to expose a traitor in their midst and protect the secrets of MI9 (1,265)	7	6		
9	Prisoners of Geography / <i>Tim Marshall</i> (Elliott & Thompson £9.99) Ten maps that tell you all you need to know about geopolitics (1,230)	8	152		
10	The Body Keeps the Score / <i>Bessel van der Kolk</i> (Penguin £12.99) Understanding psychological trauma and an alternative approach to healing (1,175)	11	15		

FICTION HARDBACKS				Last week	Weeks in top 10
1	 In the Lives of Puppets TJ Klune (Tor £18.99) A queer retelling of Carlo Collodi's The Adventures of Pinocchio tale (8,800)	—	1		
2	Happy Place / <i>Emily Henry</i> (Viking £14.99) A couple that broke up months ago pretend to still be together in front of friends (5,330)	—	1		
3	Some Desperate Glory / <i>Emily Tesh</i> (Orbit £18.99) A highly skilled warrior takes humanity's revenge into her own hands (5,115)	—	1		
4	The Bone Shard War / <i>Andrea Stewart</i> (Orbit £20) Lin Sukai hunts for seven magic swords that could stop the Empire from crumbling (3,050)	20	1		
5	It Starts With Us / <i>Colleen Hoover</i> (Simon & Schuster £14.99) Sequel to It Ends With Us, revealing Atlas's side of the story (2,245)	6	28		
6	Nemesis / <i>Wilbur Smith and Tom Harper</i> (Bonnier £22) Three strands of the Courtney family converge in a bloodthirsty bid for revenge (2,030)	4	3		
7	It Ends With Us / <i>Colleen Hoover</i> (Simon & Schuster £16.99) A hardback collector's edition of the bestselling romance novel (1,940)	2	2		
8	Simply Lies / <i>David Baldacci</i> (Macmillan £22) A former detective becomes locked in a battle of wits with a dangerous con artist (1,855)	3	3		
9	Death of a Bookseller / <i>Alice Slater</i> (Hodder £14.99) A true crime-obsessed bookseller forms an unhealthy obsession with a colleague (1,780)	—	1		
10	The Hike / <i>Lucy Clarke</i> (HarperCollins £14.99) Four friends hike out into the Norwegian wild but things take a sinister turn (1,570)	—	1		

FICTION PAPERBACKS				Last week	Weeks in top 10
1	 No Plan B Lee Child and Andrew Child (Penguin £9.99) The police rule a woman's death a suicide, Jack Reacher knows it was murder (12,450)	2	5		
2	The Family Remains / <i>Lisa Jewell</i> (Penguin £9.99) A mudlark's gruesome discovery is linked to a 30-year-old cold case (12,390)	—	1		
3	Again, Rachel / <i>Marian Keyes</i> (Penguin £9.99) Successful and nearing 50, Rachel Walsh's life is upended by an old flame (11,925)	1	3		
4	Lessons in Chemistry / <i>Bonnie Garmus</i> (Penguin £9.99) In 1960s America a chemist becomes the star of a TV cooking show (11,845)	3	9		
5	Shrines of Gaiety / <i>Kate Atkinson</i> (Penguin £9.99) In London, 1926, a ruthless nightclub owner's empire comes under threat (10,285)	—	1		
6	Desert Star / <i>Michael Connelly</i> (Orion £9.99) Renée Ballard and Harry Bosch hunt a psychopath who has haunted Bosch for years (7,165)	—	1		
7	Bleeding Heart Yard / <i>Elly Griffiths</i> (Quercus £9.99) Detective Harbinder Kaur probes the death of an eminent MP at a school reunion (6,735)	4	3		
8	An Italian Girl in Brooklyn / <i>Santa Montefiore</i> (Simon & Schuster £8.99) A young woman whose life was upended by war learns to live again (6,665)	—	1		
9	It Ends With Us / <i>Colleen Hoover</i> (Simon & Schuster £8.99) A first love's reappearance threatens a woman's relationship (6,335)	7	87		
10	Only Love Can Hurt Like This / <i>Paige Toon</i> (Penguin £8.99) A brokenhearted woman finds hope in a man who hides a life-shattering secret (5,620)	—	1		



Tories can’t hide from the reality of migration figures

Those who voted for Brexit in the hope of reducing immigration are in for another nasty surprise. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics, due at the end of this month, are expected to show a record rise for last year. The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) think tank estimates net annual migration to the UK will have passed 700,000 – more than double the pre-Brexit record. That would follow a net increase of 504,000 people in the 12 months to last June, itself a record.

While numbers arriving from the EU have flatlined, immigration from outside the EU has boomed. A post-Covid surge in students has been the biggest driver. Resettlement schemes for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, and a new visa route for those fleeing Hong Kong, have also been strong factors. An increase in people is technically welcome news for an economy with 1.1 million job vacancies and 500,000 out of the workforce through long-term sickness, although sectors that were reliant on cheap EU labour, such as hospitality and transport, continue to suffer shortages. In its March forecast the Office for Budget Responsibility said higher-than-expected immigration could add 0.5 per cent to GDP by 2027.

But for Rishi Sunak and the Conservatives it poses a major political headache. The 2019 manifesto committed the party to lowering immigration. Suella Braverman, the home secretary, reiterated that pledge last October, saying it was her “ultimate aspiration” to meet David Cameron’s target of bringing the net number to “tens of thousands”. Legal immigration blurs in some voters’ minds with the vexed question of illegal arrivals. Last year 45,000 people got into the UK on small boats, the majority applying for asylum. Robert Jenrick, the immigration minister, has warned that “excessive, uncontrolled migration threatens to cannibalise the compassion of the British public”.

Yet this relentless focus on small boats, while clearly important, is also a useful diversionary tactic for the government to avoid discussing legal migration and the demands it places on housing, GP surgeries and schools. The aim of building 300,000 homes a year, which the UK is already failing to meet, was based on an assumption that net immigration would run at 170,000 a year. According to the CPS, 430,000 new homes a year are required.

That is why Sunak wants ministers to curb numbers by stopping family members joining overseas master’s students at British universities. The UK issued 626,000 study visas last year, a rise of more than 80 per cent on 2019, and 135,790 visas were granted to students’ dependants. We report today that both Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor and Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, are backing the prime minister but do not want to go any further for fear of damaging growth. University vice-chancellors, who fear a fall in income from foreign students, are lobbying hard against any proposed restrictions.

It is essential for governments to seek some for of control over the numbers coming to this country. New Labour ended up reaping a backlash over years of high immigration. But Sunak and his colleagues should be mindful of the message they are sending to fast-growing economies such as India and Nigeria, the sources of many inbound students. Britain, with its ageing population and economic problems, still needs infusions of people and skills.

Some of the answers are to be found closer to home – partly by funding and promoting high-quality apprenticeships for UK school-leavers and killing off the lazy assumption that an expensive degree is the only acceptable route into work. Also essential is a thoughtful welfare policy to encourage back into the jobs market some of the estimated five million who are not currently working full-time.

Post Brexit, with America and the EU throwing subsidies at new technology, the UK needs to be on its competitive tiptoes. Encouraging the brightest from around the world to work and study here must be part of that. In the case of lower-paid jobs, flexibility on unskilled work visas is sensible.

However the Tories need to be nimble. When numbers rise, they should explain honestly to the public how and where new arrivals will be accommodated. And Labour, which contains a vocal faction instinctively opposed to any kind of immigration restriction, should spell out what it would do differently. High levels of immigration are likely to persist for several years. A proper debate is needed on how the UK balances cost and benefit.

Turkey’s election matters to us all: Erdogan must respect it

The world’s eyes are on Turkey. This country of 85 million people, a Nato member and bridge between Europe and the east, stands on the brink of a new political future. President Erdogan, the religious autocrat who has ruled for two decades, is challenged by the secular opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu in today’s elections.

The latest polls show Kilicdaroglu edging a victory, with between 49 and 51 per cent of the vote. More than 50 per cent is needed to avoid a run-off in two weeks’ time.

Erdogan, 69, has presided over an economic crisis, holding down interest rates as inflation has hit high double digits. His government’s inadequate response to two earthquakes that struck southern Turkey and neighbouring Syria in February, killing at least 50,000, has heightened the sense that change is in the air.

Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party, known as the AKP, has promised free and fair elections. Opposition parties have trained teams of lawyers in the hope of preventing fraud. But after Erdogan hollowed out Turkey’s institutions, including its army, judiciary and media, scepticism is warranted. Supporters of Kilicdaroglu, 74, are mindful of the 2019 Istanbul mayoral elections, in which the AKP claimed victory but a recount delivered a big win for Ekrem Imamoglu, who will be vice-president if Kilicdaroglu wins.

A former civil servant, Kilicdaroglu wants to restart talks about EU membership and has indicated he would drop opposition to Sweden joining Nato. He sees Turkey as a possible broker between Russia and Ukraine – although unlike Erdogan he would remind Moscow that Turkey signed the western nuclear pact.

These elections have huge implications. Erdogan has vowed to respect their outcome. He must stand by his word.

New tricks

Bridge has a trick up its sleeve. As we report today, the game that is seen as the preserve of elderly middle England – all sips of sherry, coffee evenings and twin sets and pearls – is bidding for the youth market. Young women especially are being drawn to it, and a new novel is seeking to do for bridge what *The Queen’s Gambit* did for chess.

We suspect it will succeed. Because bridge has never really been the serene pastime its image would suggest. Beneath

the drawing-room courtesy, every rubber is a vicious, Darwinian struggle for supremacy – intellectual rather than physical, but no less passionate and compelling for that. It is boxing for the bourgeoisie.

This fine game would lose nothing by expanding its appeal. We look forward to diamond-themed streetwear, club-themed nightclubs and grand slams on TikTok. And if existing devotees grumble about the arrivistes – well, that’s ruff.

Dominic Lawson

The euthanasia slippery slope is not a fiction



A dystopian new film from Japan has real-life echoes in Canada

The cinema is generally thought of as a place for escapism. But a film that went on general release here on Friday confronts its audience with a disturbingly realistic glimpse of a morally bleak future. *Plan 75* depicts a Japan in which when people reach the age of 75 they are given the option of euthanasia paid for, including funeral costs, by the state. The government advertises it as socially responsible: in one ad an elderly woman who has signed up declares, “My family will be so proud of me.”

The director, Chie Hayakawa, told The Guardian: “A state-sanctioned solution like Plan 75 is far from impossible in a country that is growing ever more intolerant to socially weak people: the elderly, the disabled and the people who have no money.” Ten years ago Taro Aso, then Japan’s finance minister, said the country’s increasing numbers of elderly should be allowed to “hurry up and die” because of the burden on state coffers. More recently an assistant professor of economics at Yale, Yusuke Narita, gained a cult following among Japan’s youth after proclaiming: “The only solution is pretty clear. In the end, isn’t it mass suicide and mass seppuku [ritual self-disembowelment] of the elderly?”

Actually, Japan has not legalised any form of euthanasia. The nearest thing in the English-speaking world to the dystopia presented in *Plan 75* is Canada. In 2016 its parliament passed legislation permitting voluntary euthanasia, limited to those with a terminal illness whose death was “reasonably foreseeable”. The politicians were following a Supreme Court judgment a year earlier, which ruled unconstitutional the existing ban on assisted suicide. The judges dismissed as based on “anecdotal examples” the argument that this would “initiate a descent down a slippery slope into homicide” of the vulnerable.

As a Canadian law professor, Yuan Yi Zhu, observed in a remarkable article last year for The Spectator, entitled “Why is Canada euthanising the poor?”, “It only took five years for the proverbial slope to come into view, when the Canadian parliament enacted Bill C-7, a sweeping euthanasia law which repealed the ‘reasonably foreseeable’ requirement – and the requirement that the condition should be ‘terminal’.” Anyone with an illness or a disability “which cannot be relieved under conditions that you consider acceptable” was now eligible for “medical assistance in dying (MAID)”, as it is euphemistically described.

What followed was predictable. Canadians with disabilities who couldn’t get the care they needed in a health system under enormous strain (sound familiar?) were encouraged to take the fast way out. Last year Canadian television reported that a 51-year-old Ontario woman known as Sophia was euthanised, although it turned out that her suffering was not just from a chronic condition but despair that “her meagre disability stipend left her little to survive on”. The CTV News station showed a recording of her saying: “The government sees me as expendable trash, a complainer, useless and a pain in the ass.”

In December a 52-year-old former soldier and Paralympian, Christine Gauthier, testified to the Canadian parliament that a government official had offered this caring response to her complaints about not having a wheelchair lift installed in her home: “I have a letter saying that if you’re so desperate, madam, we can offer you MAID.” It emerged that a number of other disabled veterans had received similar kind offers. In Quebec over 5 per cent of deaths are now from MAID.

Canada’s parliamentary budget officer has proclaimed the financial savings MAID offers the state. As Yuan Yi Zhu put it: “Healthcare, particularly for those suffering from chronic conditions, is expensive; but assisted suicide only costs the taxpayer \$2,327 per ‘case’.”

I have been concerned for many years about how an “assisted dying” law in this country might affect the disabled – and attitudes towards them. My younger daughter, who has Down’s syndrome, is generally treated by the state as having “capacity”: that is, the ability to take decisions about what she wants, in her own interests. But she is highly suggestible, which in this context is a great worry. Because of this I was invited to attend, in 2011, a focus group organised by the disability charity Scope, in which its members discussed what a UK assisted-suicide law might mean for them.

One, Andy, talked of how, when he had recently been in hospital, a doctor had walked up to his bed and said: “I think we should seriously consider your future.” Andy went on: “We are already pressurised not to demand proper medical care, and the pressure would become even greater if assisted suicide were legalised. It would be a case of ‘You should have yourself killed, mate. Then we won’t have to pay your disability living allowance.’”

Another participant, Valerie, said something so sad at the meeting: “When I was younger, if I fell over in the street, two or three people would always rush to pick me up. Now people just walk past. I am no longer even part of the scenery.” I wrote at the time: “This is the state of mind, on both sides, in which assisted suicide for the severely physically disabled could so insidiously turn from being a liberating option into something more like an oppressive social obligation.”

Opinion polls consistently show the British public strongly in favour of “assisted dying”. But that euphemism (it replaced “voluntary euthanasia” seems to have confused millions. When the pollsters Survation asked members of the public in 2021, “What do you understand by the term ‘assisted dying’?”, and offered four definitions, only 43 per cent gave the correct answer: “Providing people who have less than six months to live with lethal drugs to end their life.” Almost the same number (42 per cent) thought it meant: “Giving people who are dying the right to stop life-prolonging treatment.” The latter has always been available: no adult is forced to have treatment against their will.

One thus confused was no less than the former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey. Writing in favour of Lord Falconer’s Assisted Dying Bill in 2014, he said he had switched to this side of the argument because “sophisticated medical science... offers people the chance to be kept alive far beyond anything that would have been possible only a few years ago. Yet our laws have not kept up with the science.”

I realise he has had quite enough publicity recently, but the present primate, Justin Welby, got it right in his own contribution: “It would be very naive to think that many of the elderly people who are abused and neglected each year, as well as many severely disabled individuals, would not be put under pressure to end their lives if assisted suicide were permitted by law.”

That is not fiction.

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“She applied for a stairlift and was offered death

Hadley Freeman

Harry’s ghostwriter fell into the same trap as me



While writing her memoir, I began seeing Victoria Beckham as my friend

It was spring 2006, and I was standing in the Beckhams’ garden in Madrid, surrounded by footballers I didn’t recognise. “I think I just met three men called Ronaldo?” I texted my more football-savvy friend Jess. I attempted conversational French with a man whose name I didn’t know but whom two months later I would watch headbutting a rival in the World Cup: it was Zinedine Zidane. The one party guest I did recognise, Gordon Ramsay, approached me: “Why are you here?” he asked. Apparently, my efforts to look as though I fitted in hadn’t worked.

Why was I there? David Beckham had very sweetly invited me to his party because I was ghostwriting Victoria’s guide to fashion, *That Extra Half an Inch*, a title that was supposed to be simultaneously, for reasons I never entirely understood, a reference to high heels and a sexual innuendo. But the interviewing part of the job was done, and I should have been in my flat in London pounding out the book now. So why had I flown to Spain for a party attended mainly by footballers? The answer was I’d succumbed to ghostitis, that common illness of ghostwriters when you cross the line between observing your subject and liking them.

JR Moehringer is a far more experienced ghost than me, given that my ghosting career began and ended in the Beckhams’ house. But while reading his article in The New Yorker last week about his experiences as Prince Harry’s ghost, I detected strong signs of ghostitis.

“Harry couldn’t escape the wish that *Spare* might be a rebuttal to every lie ever published about him,” he writes a touch regretfully. And yet it’s striking that Moehringer does the same in his article, making sure to mention everyone who has ever committed an injustice against him, from the “influential critic” who wrote an unfavourable review of one of his novels, to the British newspapers that reduced the “complex emotions” in *Spare* to “cartoonish idiocy”. The most unexpected score-settling comes early on: “The ghostwriter for Julian Assange [Andrew O’Hagan] wrote 25,000 words about

his methodology, and it sounded to me like Elon Musk on mushrooms – on Mars,” he writes. If you’re wondering why Moehringer is making this drive-by swipe at O’Hagan over an article that appeared in the London Review of Books nine years ago, then his next sentence should answer that for you: “That same ghost, however, published a review of *Spare* describing Harry as ‘off his royal tits’ and me as going ‘all Sartre or Faulkner’, so what do I know?” Truly, no one can bear a grudge like a writer who gets a bad review.

At the risk of causing Moehringer to foment yet another resentment against another ghost, some of the claims in his article sounded decidedly psychedelic to me. First there was his suggestion that Prince Harry and the American basketball player LeBron James spark a similar kind of mob hatred for the same reason: “Racism, surely.” Surely. Then there’s his theory for why the discount clothing chain TK Maxx disputed one of Harry’s claims in the book: “Surely TK Maxx’s effort to discredit Harry’s memoir was unrelated to the company’s long-standing partnership with Prince Charles and his charitable trust.” He’s cracked it, folks: it’s the big TK Maxx King Charles III conspiracy.

Watching Moehringer adopt Harry’s mode of umbrage and petty retaliation made me smile a little nostalgically. Maybe the two men always had similar natures, but it’s at least as likely he was influenced by the permanently aggrieved prince. It’s hard not to imitate your subject

when you’re a ghost: you spend a lot of time with them and they are extremely famous, which is, on a sad and superficial level, unavoidably impressive. Moehringer mimics Harry’s grievances; I briefly considered buying a pair of denim hotpants like Victoria’s. Tomayto, tomahto.

Sometimes a ghost becomes disillusioned with their subject: in Robert Harris’s 2007 novel *The Ghost*, the writer suspects that the Tony Blair-esque prime minister was recruited by the CIA. O’Hagan realised that Assange “thought I was his creature, and he forgot what a writer is, someone with a tendency to write things down and perhaps seek the truth”. Jennie Erdal fell out spectacularly with the late publisher Naim Attallah when she revealed she had ghosted everything he wrote – from letters to novels – in her 2004 memoir *Ghosting*.

But I never stopped liking Victoria: after the book was finished, she came to London and we went vintage shopping together – I still wear the dresses she picked out for me – and she took me as her plus-one to the Met Gala in New York. We walked through it with Jennifer Lopez and her then husband, Marc Anthony, and when photographers approached us, Anthony and I would hold the handbags and stand to the side, the less photogenic spouses who knew our place. It was fun – she was fun. A little isolated, it seemed to me, but that meant we had more time to go shopping on the Portobello Road. But one day I was told that “Victoria’s management” was concerned I might sell stories about her, and I never heard from any of them again. Why would I sell stories about my friend, I thought at the time, bewildered and, at 28, still so naive.

When I see photos of the Beckhams now, 17 years later, it’s like spotting school friends on Facebook you haven’t seen since you left. I understand Moehringer’s desire to defend the prince he came to like so much, but this feeling of fondness is ultimately an illusion. You were only ever their creature, and only for a moment.

@HadleyFreeman

“I still wear the dresses Victoria picked out for me



Matthew Syed

We need to wake up: mankind's progress could lead to our extinction



There may be a link between the seriousness of our predicament and the shallowness of our culture

The author and illustrator Tim Urban recently wrote a blog post inviting readers to imagine human history as a 1,000-page book. If the human species is 250,000 years old, he notes, this would make each page equivalent to 250 years.

A striking thing about this book – let us call it the Book of Humanity – is that for almost its entire length precious little happens. We hunt and gather in much the same way for decade after decade, century after century, millennium after millennium. There may be an improvement in the design of an arrowhead or a way of tracking wildebeest, but otherwise the book is grudgingly dull. Civilisations don't appear until page 970, and it is on page 993 that the era called AD begins.

But perhaps the most striking thing of all is that it isn't until the final page – page 1,000 – that the story transforms from tedium into a mind-bending, rip-roaring thriller. Changes burst from the page like fireworks, including almost everything we associate with the modern world: industrialisation, population explosion, economic growth, electricity, cars, computers, you name it. An alien reading the book, Urban suggested, would be thinking: "OK, shit is going down!"

This long view of history is worth pondering since it underlines the uniqueness of our age. People have probably always believed their time was special, but today it is undeniably true. Technology is racing ahead in almost every field, which is why over the past two centuries we've enjoyed rising living standards, new cures for diseases and many other blessings.

But there is another aspect of this final page that I find myself pondering more and more: we have crossed the technological threshold where we have the power to destroy ourselves. An obvious example is that the world contains thousands of nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert capable of annihilating our species many times over. In some ways we are fortunate that enriching uranium is difficult, which is why only nation states have so far developed this capability.

Yet other technologies are emerging that put ever more power in the hands of the masses. A couple of generations ago sophisticated computation was reserved for giant machines used by governments; now it is embedded in every smartphone. Or take synthetic biology. The philosopher Toby Ord has noted that when this was invented it took 13 years and billions of dollars to sequence the human genome. Today genomes can be sequenced in minutes for less than \$500, and online synthesis services allow anyone to upload a sequence and have it constructed – a bit like 3D printing – and posted to them. Students are using gene-editing techniques in science competitions.

In many ways this democratisation of technology is wonderful. It has given millions access to opportunities beyond the dreams of previous generations. But it also has a darker side. A few years ago the full sequence of the Spanish flu virus (which killed between 50 million and 100 million people) was posted on the internet and the microbe reconstructed; not long afterwards a Dutch virologist manipulated H5N1 (a bird flu virus that kills 60 per cent of the humans it infects) to make it more contagious. How long before it is

possible for a solitary fanatic to design and release a pathogen capable of killing millions, perhaps billions?

We need to wake up. Our species has crossed the Rubicon and is travelling ever deeper into uncharted territory. Our ingenuity has made us powerful beyond imagination but also acutely vulnerable. This isn't just about well-known dangers like climate change but the way technology is pushing boundaries and incubating risks that few are even aware of, let alone confronting. A debate about AI has flared up in the past month – many of its pioneers now believe it could one day destroy us – but the truth is that this is merely one item on an ever growing list.

You may comfort yourself with the idea that bright people are working on the challenge of existential risk. You may suppose there are intergovernmental forums devoted to the topic; huge

budgets for tackling the powder keg we have placed under our future. If so, you'd be wrong. Ord notes that the biological weapons convention set up to police synthetic biology is overseen by just three staff with no powers of enforcement. Their budget is about the same as that of an average McDonald's.

We are living in a state of denial, inching towards an iceberg of our own making while looking the other way. An alien reading the Book of Humanity would be mystified by how a species with the intellect to reach such thrilling heights of scientific achievement could simultaneously have a political culture thrashing about in the shallows of decadence and superficiality. At the very moment we needed to step up to an unprecedented threat, we were busily debating whether using the word "curry" amounted to cultural appropriation.

And I can't help wondering if there is a link between the seriousness of our predicament and the shallowness of our culture.

Perhaps in the same way that individuals who struggle with their own mortality find creative ways to avoid thinking about it, so civilisations facing existential risk develop their own kinds of distraction. The culture wars, in this sense, may be seen not as genuine debates but as a form of Freudian displacement. The woke and anti-woke need each other to engage in their piffing spats as a diversion from realities they both find too psychologically threatening to confront. One is reminded of the myth of the Byzantine senators retreating to debate the sex of angels as thousands of Ottomans massed outside the walls of Constantinople with cannon and gunpowder.

Either way, we can't go on like this. I alluded to catastrophic risk in a previous column, and one of the most popular responses was: "Give it a break! We want something uplifting on a Sunday morning!" In some ways I understand this perspective, but I also think it's increasingly untenable. Life is beautiful and precious; a brief illumination of existence before we depart into a limitless night. I want future generations to experience this gift, the billions who might yet be ravished by the miracle of consciousness but whose opportunity will be obliterated unless we grip this danger.

It won't be easy. Inventions can't be un-invented. A global moratorium on advanced AI may sound sensible, but a rogue state could secretly push ahead before turning on everyone else. As with all large-scale co-operation, the risk of cheating hovers like an apparition. But we mustn't stop trying. I yearn for global leaders to convene a forum of the most able ministers to confront existential risk; to instruct universities to set up multidisciplinary departments to analyse it and allocate serious funds to mitigating it.

We have the intelligence to deal with this danger, but the subtler question is different: do we have the wisdom?

A few years ago the great biologist EO Wilson opined: "The real problem of humanity is that we have palaeolithic emotions, medieval institutions and godlike technology. And it's terribly dangerous. It's now approaching a point of crisis overall."

It was a neat summary of the human predicament at page 1,000 of our story. Unless we act, we'll never make it to page 1,001.

@MatthewSyed

Adam Wagner

If carrying
Sellotape is
an offence,
this new law
cannot hold

Sixty-four people were arrested on the day of the coronation. The Metropolitan Police have questions to answer about how they exercised vast new powers to disrupt peaceful protest, as do parliamentarians for giving them those powers. They say they “regret” that six of those arrested “were unable to join the wider group of protesters”. Three safety volunteers were arrested for carrying rape alarms on the grounds that they would cause “serious disruption”.

The Met commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, has defended the force, arguing that “tolerance for disruption of the coronation celebrations was low”. Officers told him crowds “applauded and cheered as they made 17 arrests in The Mall”. It is concerning that the police seem to be seeking the adulation of crowds, but the more important question arising from last weekend’s partial suppression of peaceful protest is whether it was anomalous or a sign of things to come.

In the police’s defence, they were stuck with enforcing a law, the Public Order Act 2023, that had come into force two days earlier, having been rushed through parliament in time for the coronation. Some officers were probably getting flashbacks to Covid, when rules appeared out of nowhere at the moment they had to start enforcing them.

The Public Order Act marks a big change in the relationship between citizens and the state. The government originally justified the extreme powers it gives the police as a response to Insulate Britain-style roadblocks, but the powers are much wider than that. It is now a criminal offence to “lock on” – defined as attaching oneself to another person, an object or land, causing “serious disruption”. It is even an offence to be “equipped for locking on”.

Why is this a problem? Practically anything can be used to lock on, including glue, string, tape and luggage straps. A person attending a protest might reasonably bring any of those things for, say, making signs. The police can arrest anyone they have reasonable grounds to suspect is about to commit an offence. Given the vagueness of locking

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**Many more
people will end
up in prison, as is
now happening**

an offences, the number of protesters liable for arrest has hugely expanded.

It gets worse. The 2023 act allows police who “reasonably believe” locking-on offences “may” be committed to carry out stop and search without suspicion in an area for up to 24 hours. This is a power originally developed to tackle knife crime. It is now being turned on people taking Sellotape to a protest.

Another tool borrowed from the policing of violent crime is “serious disruption prevention orders”. Anyone convicted of more than one protest-related offence, or of breaching any of the huge array of anti-protest injunctions now in force, can be ordered not to enter town centres or associate with other protesters – or do practically anything the Home Office can dream up. If they breach the order, they can go to prison for up to two years.

More broadly, the Public Order Act amounts to a declaration of war against the right to protest. Previously, the touchstone for interference with that right was when disruptive protest spilt over into a threat to public order – and violence. That is the right balance, though nobody says it is easy to achieve. Now, disruption in and of itself is defined in the criminal law as a threat to public order. Many more people will end up in prison, as is already happening.

But I have no doubt the result will be the opposite of what the government intended. The wider public will avoid protests for fear of being caught in the police dragnet, like the royal “superfan” Alice Chambers, detained for 13 hours after standing next to Just Stop Oil protesters at the coronation. The people who turn up will be more radical and will seek ever more disruptive tactics to get their voices heard.

I do not envy the officers who have been tasked with disrupting protest. But I suspect the new public order powers will lead to plenty more “regrets” before they are assigned to the legislative scrapheap where they belong.

*Adam Wagner is a barrister at Doughty Street Chambers and the author of **Emergency State: How We Lost Our Freedoms in the Pandemic and Why It Matters** (Bodley Head)*



Robert Colvile

As we squabble over bendy bananas and bash Big Tech, investors are quietly slipping away



Last week the Tories went bananas over Brexit. Bendy bananas, rather. Kemi Badenoch, the business secretary, announced that the Retained EU Law Bill would be scrapping only 600 EU rules straight off, rather than the promised thousands – with the rescued laws including the notorious regulation on the “abnormal curvature” of a certain fruit. Backbenchers drew angry comparisons with an advert from Rishi Sunak’s leadership campaign in which a white-shirted office drone fed piles of EU rules into a shredder while *Ode to Joy* blasted out on the soundtrack. The row wasn’t just about a clash between pragmatism and principle. It reflected a growing concern among Brexiters that the government hasn’t done enough to pinpoint areas in which Britain can steal a march on the EU. There is a slightly farcical element to this – not least the idea that you show virility and purity through the sheer number of rules you axe, never mind the actual detail. But those MPs do have a point. Post-Brexit regulation has been a policy merry-go-round, subject to endless changes of personnel and approach. It wasn’t until years after the referendum that a specific unit was created to marshal progress, and it was pitifully underpowered compared with,

say, the legions working on the Cop26 climate conference. Yes, there has been good work done, such as the Edinburgh reforms to financial services. But even then the EU may actually beat us to reforming the Solvency II insurance regime, which has been weighing down our investment prospects. But it’s not just about EU laws. There is a far broader concern – forcefully expressed by Sir James Dyson in The Times yesterday – that when it comes to business and innovation, Britain is simply not at the races. In 2012 the economist Andy Haldane gave a speech highlighting the increased scale of financial regulation. He pointed out that the ratio of regulators to financial service workers had increased from 1:11,000 in 1980 to 1:300 in 2011. I don’t have access to his methodology, but from counting up the numbers in various annual reports, I put the figure today at roughly 1:75. In other words, the number of regulators may have quadrupled in just over a decade. Likewise, the average FTSE 350 company report is 64 per cent longer than it was five years ago, because of all the extra reporting requirements – which helps explain why so few companies are listing here. This isn’t just about finance. As Dyson says, it often feels as if the British state is

doing more to deter growth and innovation than encourage them. Officials are itching to reimpose costly checks on food arriving from the EU, even though it is demonstrably safe. The Natural England quango has done more to block housebuilding than any Tory backbencher. There was a lot of scoffing about post-Brexit Britain becoming “Singapore-on-Thames”. But the attraction of Singapore, as with the faster-growing US states, is not just the lower taxes but also the way investors are treated as honoured guests rather than being bounced from department to department. In France global chief executives are whisked to the Élysée Palace. In Britain officials take almost six months to answer Dyson’s letters. Investment funds with billions allocated to the UK describe the process of actually deploying that capital as like wading through treacle. Leaving the EU was always going to hit the economy. But the worst forecasts all assumed nothing else would change; that we would not make ourselves more competitive to compensate. And indeed on pretty much every axis we have done scandalously little to adjust. We have raised corporation tax, sharply. The government urged those of us who objected to look beyond

headline figures. But look where? Our agile, accommodating planning system, which makes it easy to build and power factories and laboratories? The plentiful and affordable housing we provide for their workers? Our world-class transport infrastructure? Our rock-bottom energy prices? Our world-beating and consistent investment incentives? I voted Remain, largely because I didn’t trust the British state to get Brexit right. But after the Leave vote I thought it would at least respond to the brute necessity to compete. Instead, the headlines are filled with

bosses such as Dyson and companies such as Revolut and Johnson Matthey bemoaning Britain’s attitude to business, or national champions such as ARM listing their shares in New York because they feel London is becoming a backwater. We are about to bring in the world’s most prominent piece of tech-bashing regulation, the Online Safety Bill, and are threatening firms with multibillion-pound fines across several pieces of legislation. Meta is threatening to pull WhatsApp from British phones because of our insistence on breaking end-to-end encryption as part of the bill. Microsoft is furious that our competition authority blocked its attempt to buy the maker of *Call of Duty* – which, irrespective of the merits of the arguments, surely has very little to do with us, as they’re both American firms. The prime minister keeps making glowing statements about how he wants to make the UK a hub for video games, or AI, or start-ups. But much of Whitehall doesn’t seem to have got the message. This, indeed, is our core Brexit delusion: that we can still carry on as we were, that the world still owes us a living, even as the terms of trade have changed. I could give example after example, but here’s a very simple one. The latest survey from the Investment Association showed that UK wealth management

firms control more than £10 trillion in assets. But only £1.6 trillion was invested in this country. And the proportion of share portfolios devoted to UK firms had fallen from 37 per cent to 23 per cent in just a decade. Put simply, the smartest investors in the country think we’re a bad long-term bet. And that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Without investment there will be even less growth. Which is why it’s particularly alarming that, of that £1.6 trillion, only £40 billion is invested in UK infrastructure. Ministers are aware of these concerns. A review is under way of our attractiveness as an investment destination. Badenoch’s package of announcements had good things to say on regulation as a last resort, and on getting regulators to consider the growth impact of their decisions. But it’s hard to shake the feeling that reformers are pushing water uphill; that the UK too often sees itself as a market leader surrounded by a spacious moat, rather than a small player that must scrap ruthlessly for every advantage. A decade ago David Cameron tried to popularise the idea that Britain was in a “global race”. We still are. And it would help an awful lot if we put on some running shoes. @RColvile

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

‘Inclusive’ language is sheer misogyny

Hadley Freeman spoke to doctors who were concerned that the word “woman” had been deleted from some NHS website pages about women’s health (“Welcome to the doctors’ resistance”, Comment, last week). Curious, I checked out the site’s section on ovarian cancer. Sure enough, there is no mention of women or even females on the first page; only a note that “anyone with ovaries” can get ovarian cancer. If you click to page 3, this is eventually spelt out as “women, trans men, non-binary people and intersex people with ovaries”. I then looked at the section on prostate cancer. By contrast, this acknowledges on the first page that it is a disease of the male reproductive system. Men are mentioned repeatedly on that page and throughout. Trans women, who also have a prostate gland, are never mentioned. Why is there no need to talk about “anyone with a prostate” in discussing prostate cancer? Why don’t

men need to be inclusive? The whole thing is simply misogyny. *Rebecca Chandler-Wilde, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire* **Captured college** Freeman writes that the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCP) rebuked its members for questioning the statement that biological sex was “socially contrived”. She also reports that the RCP has received a gold award from the destructive organisation Stonewall. This makes me proud to say I am not a member of the RCP. Having qualified as a doctor in England but trained as a psychiatrist in the US, I remain a distinguished life member of the American Psychiatric Organisation. Those of us who have worked in clinical practice throughout our careers in psychotherapy have been aware for a long time that the public are being badly misled by prejudiced, ideologically driven, non-scientific sources. *Joseph Berger, psychiatrist, Netanya, Israel*



The creators of Fireman Sam are hot under the collar

The desecration of Fireman Sam

We produced and directed the original *Fireman Sam* TV series. During all the years of his success, we have never commented publicly on his further adventures around the world. However, pictures of Boris Johnson dressed in a Fireman Sam costume have

prompted us to change this (Martin Hemming, Comment, last week). For Johnson to benefit from these Twitter publicity photos, released by his wife, is a bitter pill for us. He is as far from the ethos of brave, selfless firemen serving the community as could be imagined. *Ian Frampton and John Walker, Weston-super-Mare*

WFH martinets are a gift to me

I am absolutely delighted, as a Canary Wharf-based IT manager, to read of competitors taking a hard line against staff working from home (Business, last week). Recruiting and retaining talented IT staff is difficult. Anything that makes good workers leave office jobs to come and work for my company – where attendance at the office is required only twice a month – helps me enormously. I have a team of about 25, of whom only five are based in London. The rest are based around the world. This is not a problem. We don’t need to sit together in a row to be productive. *Jim Smith, Twickenham* **Scattered workforce** I read Jill Treanor’s article with bemusement. For decades large companies have created service platforms offshore and outsourced core

functions, thus separating colleagues from one another. They argued this was good for their businesses. So why is it that now, when colleagues are separated because they wish to work from home, they decide it is detrimental? I suspect that the obsession with getting workers back into the office is really due to bosses taking the easy option of managing by input (seeing people at their desks) and an inability to manage by output (what those people actually produce). *James Nicholson, Goudhurst, Kent* **Virtually alone** I do not see the point of commuting an hour each way to the office to sit on Microsoft Teams calls for six and a half hours. If there is a real reason to be there – collaboration, reviews, challenging discussions and so on – fine; but often the reality is aimless hours spent in open-plan offices full of people wearing headphones. *Nicholas Reeks, Newport*

Waiting lists force us to go private

Robert Colvile says the fact that NHS waiting lists have stopped rising is good news for Rishi Sunak (Comment, last week). However, there is an important reason for these figures that Colvile does not mention. Many of us who have been on waiting lists for a long time – and have suffered painfully as a result – have decided to use our hard-earned savings, often put by for our retirement, to go private. The Conservatives should not get credit for this. Perhaps this government can look at how other European countries run their health services. The NHS has been great but is outdated: we need a brave party to look at healthcare with fresh eyes. *Elly Bunn Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire*

Rigged numbers Let me give Colvile one explanation for the fact that waiting lists have stopped rising. My wife recently saw her GP with a view to being referred to a consultant. She was told that local hospitals have closed their lists for the type of procedure she required, thus preventing the numbers from rising. To paraphrase the old saying, there are lies, damned lies and Tory health policy. *Geoff Johnson, Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria*

Old bangers go up in flames

In your story on an electric BMW that caused a raging fire, you cited research stating that petrol and diesel cars are four times as likely to have fires as electric ones (News, last week). But you cannot fairly compare without factoring in the age of the vehicle. The older it is, the more likely to have a fault that leads to a fire. Most older cars have combustion engines so you would expect to see more fires in that group. Examine fires in recently produced vehicles and I

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Docs’ army The NHS needs to fill some of its 9,000 medical vacancies, at least temporarily, while long-term recruitment issues are dealt with. One way to do this would be to commission “reserve” doctors. They would mostly come from the recently retired, be retained on the medical register and have crown indemnity. They would help especially in times of crisis such as the winter flu season and epidemics. There would be a need for regular updates and mentoring, and they would probably not be suitable for interventional activities; but it would be cheaper overall than using agency staff. *Dr Michael Joy, retired consultant physician and cardiologist, Taunton*

Unhealthy growth Colville says, “Unless we can keep people healthier for longer, or galvanise GDP growth, we’ll soon have a health system with a vestigial economy attached.” But growth in the economy and prevention of illness can be in conflict. A reduction in gambling, drinking and junk food consumption would make a healthier population, for example. So would less car usage, especially if it went with more walking and cycling. But our economists class all economic activity as good because it adds to GDP. *Chris Padley, Lincoln*

suspect you will see a higher percentage of electric cars. But there would be strong reasons for some to hide this. *Richard Harris Las Palmas, Spain* **Safety comes second** You report that BMW has not admitted fault and the burnt-out car has “disappeared”. I am saddened to see this corporate greed and arrogance shown by BMW. The vehicle was Ms Samani’s property and they should suitably compensate her. Their current stance is deeply suspect. *Rob James, Sonning Common Oxfordshire*

Your comments from [thesundaytimes.co.uk](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk)

POINTS

Selfish sticks Rosie Varley is right about the blight of smartphones in art galleries (Letters, last week). We have just returned from a holiday to Venice, Florence and Rome. Our visits to galleries were bedevilled by phones – and don’t get me started on selfie sticks. We felt an urge to employ the latter in a way wholly unconnected with photography. *Karen Wood Bourne, Lincolnshire*

Wolfe’s vision Varley notes that visitors spend more time on the descriptions next to each painting than the art itself. The author Tom Wolfe once wrote about this: he predicted it would culminate in a reproduction the size of a postage stamp, dwarfed by a description covering the whole wall around it. I wish Wolfe were still with us to lay the photo-takers. *Martin Pooley Opotiki, New Zealand*

War chest Reporting on the coronation ceremony, Quentin Letts observed that “Tom Tugendhat had so many medals on his chest, he must have been collecting Kellogg’s tokens all year” (News, last week). I believe Tugendhat was awarded those Kellogg’s tokens while serving his

country in Iraq and Afghanistan. How many such tokens, I wonder, has Letts? *Timothy Marsh Minehead, Somerset*

Shaw shot George Bernard Shaw would have been delighted by the trigger warning applied to *Pygmalion* at the Old Vic (Rod Liddle, Comment, last week). In fact the whole play is a trigger warning, written to show the coercive control of an entire social class by another. It is a tribute to Shaw’s brilliance that he was able to disguise his brutal message within a cosy drawing-room comedy. Familiarity has since turned it into a safe period piece; if the new production manages to recover the original barbed message, as relevant today as ever, it will have earned its trigger warning. *David Clouston, Colchester*

French draws Lee Thacker points out that France gets more visitors than the UK, in spite of not having a monarchy (Letters, last week). That’s because France has two things we never will: the Alps in winter and the Mediterranean in summer. I have spent far more on skiing trips in France than on holidays in Britain. *Derek Maddison Chelmsford*

BIRTHDAYS

Francesca Annis, actress, 78
David Byrne, musician, 71
Cate Blanchett, actress, 54
Sofia Coppola, film-maker, 52
George Lucas, film-maker, 79
Olly Murs, singer, 39
Tim Roth, actor, 62
Ruby Walsh, jockey, 44
Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook co-founder, 39



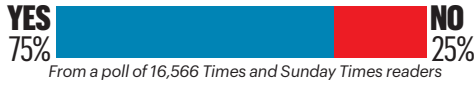
Tim Roth is 62 today

ANNIVERSARIES

1264 English barons under Simon de Montfort defeat Henry III at Battle of Lewes
1607 Jamestown settled, England’s first permanent colony in America
1796 Edward Jenner’s first smallpox inoculation

READERS’ POLL

Last week we asked:
Have the Conservatives been in power too long?



From a poll of 16,566 Times and Sunday Times readers

This week’s question:
Are 20mph speed limits a good idea?
Have your say at [sundaytimes.co.uk/poll](https://www.sundaytimes.co.uk/poll)

We high-flyers are now hard up too

Ali Hussain’s article “£200k a year and struggling: affluence isn’t what it was” (News, last week) brilliantly captures the anxieties of the squeezed middle in our society. My wife and I are in our early thirties and lucky to be in the top 10 per cent of household incomes, but many people would be surprised by our relatively frugal lifestyle. We do not own a car, rarely holiday abroad, live in a modest three-bedroom house, and struggle to put away a couple of hundred pounds each month despite being careful with our money. We want to start a family and are anxious about the pressure on our finances. I feel sympathy for those who are less comfortable than us. It raises the question: who is the economy really working for? *Adam Rolewicz, Faversham*

Oblivious to privilege You outline the shopping, motoring and parenting choices that constitute this “comfortable lifestyle”. I have absolutely no sympathy for people who complain about the prices in Waitrose as they load their shopping into their Range Rover and then shoot off to collect Jacynnda from pony club. They are probably the same people who are

appalled when those living in council houses have smartphones and large TVs. *Stephen Allison, King’s Lynn* **No incentive** Some will deride this article, but it does highlight the fact that the UK is becoming like big American cities where only the ultra-wealthy can afford what used to be a good middle-class lifestyle. That is not a good thing. We want people to be able to afford to raise children. We want them to aspire to be skilled professionals. The mark of a successful society is a burgeoning middle class. A society that doesn’t reward honest, hard-working people is one doomed to fail. *Daniel Shaw, Stourbridge*

Elementary maths In your example a family with £152,404 after tax spends nearly £46,000 on school fees. Surely a simple solution to their problems would be to stop sending the two children to private schools. They would be better off and would no longer be supporting a system that promotes social and economic inequality. *Jon Cronin Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire* **A head for figures** The headline of your article could be improved. A better one might be: “Why private school is not worth it”. *Ali Parker, London E11*

COMMENT

Camilla Long

Charlie’s looking gnarly — if I were the heir I’d start pushing for an abdication date



As a photo, it was extraordinary. A lightly powdered, slightly greying collection of dusty, crusting royals, like the frozen figures on an ashen wedding cake. In one corner Princess Alexandra – wearing white like Miss Havisham – was being physically held up by the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh. And she wasn’t even the oldest in the coronation “working royals” group portrait. The oldest was the Duke of Kent, 87, who is 40th in line to the throne.

Never mind whether the group was “too white” or not; it was certainly too old. I do wonder if this collection of aged and remote, unfamiliar relics in their panto robes (average age: 60) is what Charles had in mind when he imperiously let it be known he favoured a “slimmed-down monarchy”.

Did it at any point occur to him, when he was running a fat, bejewelled finger down the family tree, that, far from having the luxury of slimming things down himself, he would find that it had, by the time he got to it, drastically self-slimmed to the point of extinction?

No Andrew; no Harry; no perky Yorkies. No Tindalls or Phillipses: none of the youngsters. No one under 50 apart from William and Kate, who are 75 in spirit anyway. You found yourself falling hungrily on Princess Anne for a bit of punky rebelliousness. Swashbuckled up in her man’s trousers, man’s boots and big old witchfinder’s cape, Anne, 72, is definitely the best king we never had.

But, apart from her, Charles desperately needs to hire.

As for the coronation itself, it didn’t help that the visual language was “ancient cursed king finally wakes up in *The Lord of the Rings*”. Here we were expected to watch Camilla, a woman of 75 dressed up in a white gown with, essentially, two bridesmaids, be united with a man who looked as if he might pass out when he got up.

At one point, halfway between being dressed and undressed – there is nothing more ageing than being passed around like a naked toddler – he struggled to stand up from the throne. I said to a friend, why didn’t they zhuzh it up a bit? Sack off some of the more tiring

HUGO BURNAND/ROYAL HOUSEHOLD 2023/PA



The King and the post-coronation Buckingham Palace photograph of his “collection of aged, remote and unfamiliar relics” does not inspire much excitement

bits from this two-hour marathon? Reduce the *Shrek* trumpeters? But apparently if you leave off the armills or the gold sticks, it doesn’t count. Coronations themselves are ageist: they’re far too knacker for old people.

Few people who watched last weekend can have been in any doubt: this was truly a bizarre, once-in-a-lifetime circus of swords and royal girdles. Not many people had ever seen a coronation: what, exactly, is it? Is it a wedding, a celebration, a funeral? It defied classification. My feeling was: funeral. It marked not the beginning of something, but the end of a period of great excitement, hope, change, drama and trauma in the royal family. You can’t help but feel that there’ll be nothing now until George is grown up and picks someone nobody approves of.

Is Charles aware of this? The stretch of nothingness that needs to be filled with personality and passion and entertainment? It’s not that I mind older people doing jobs for as long as they want – the Queen did hers much better than almost anyone at 96. But, even as a

rookie at 74, Charles already seems over it: he has failed at the first hurdle, namely, producing an inspirational, dazzling, hopeful and forward-looking coronation. Most of it was kind of glum. The most thrilling part was when the unacceptable wing of the family strolled into church.

I was hoping for more theatre, more sumptuous taste, more gasp-worthy moments, more “trees at Kate’s wedding”. Instead we got Charles slumped in orange and purple, like a drunk Christingle. Had anyone thought through the visuals when it came to the portraits? Compare Charles’s coronation pictures with the Elizabeth’s and they’re not even the same art form. We’re constantly told that Charles is the “artistic” one. But why hang out with all those annoying luvvies if they can’t help you with the one serious performance of your career?

It won’t do, this uninspiring, threadbare, wheezing collection of corpses. The late Queen knew that monarchy was essentially a vacuum, and that it was up to you to fill it with pageants, investitures, parties,

receptions, fly-pasts, good news stories; not just boring plans for quiche or weird invitations. She was no less socially awkward than Charles, but she worked hard to build a relatable world around her. I don’t even know what Charles’s world is, apart from squirrels.

It matters, how the King behaves; how he projects the hopes of a nation. The

“There’ll be nothing new now until George grows up and picks the wrong girlfriend

senior royals are the big guns in our diplomatic armoury. Donald Trump wasn’t interested in meeting Theresa May; he wanted tea with the Queen. Who will rush to a banquet with Charles? Not Joe Biden. If royals can’t do the one job they’re hired for, then what is the argument for royalty?

And then there is William, who is now king in waiting; never has there been a keener heir. A recent episode of *The Crown* showed Charles pushing for his mother’s abdication; John Major rushed to tell people this was “damaging and malicious fiction”. Well, he would say that, wouldn’t he?

It can’t have failed to occur to William and certainly Kate that the sooner the crown comes to them, the better. Kate has already packed more personality and excitement into her candid snaps of the children than Charles managed in the whole coronation cycle. Plus: those heart-soaring family videos. One week on, I’m wondering if they shouldn’t be pushing for his abdication, before his vision for the monarchy, if there is one, becomes too gnarly, too tired, too moany, too dull.

Queue jump curse catches up with Phil and Holly

To telly-land, and the juddering Holly and Phil implosion.

We’re told the pair, who’ve shared the ITV sofa for nearly 14 years now, are in the middle of a “feud”.

I’m not sure what the “feud” is, but it appears Schofield is toast, having displeased the M&S/Garnier brand ambassador by not giving her a heads-up that his brother was a paedophile and/or refusing to publicly “address” the fact they jumped the queue for the Queen’s coffin in September.

Willoughby has been so *fewmin* that Schofield admitted the past few weeks “haven’t been easy for either of us”. But that was also viewed as a “betrayal” by Holly, leaving Phil “scared” and Monday’s episode hanging in the balance.

“Monday’s episode is very much D-Day,” said a source, “but the same could apply to any day next week.”

Monday’s episode hanging in the balance?

It could be D-Day *all week*?

To quote Kourtney Kardashian: “Kim, there’s people that are dying.”

Who are these two self-indulgent, rhinestone-encrusted, shrieking merchants of trivial me-me-me drama?

I don’t mean to be rude, but by the end of the year, when Schofield’s contract runs out, we could all be dead from a nuclear attack by Putin or overrun by AI robots wearing Elon Musk masks. Do we need a minute-by-minute narration of the most lightweight hair-off since *Big Brother* series 3?

Tomiwa Owolade

Week ending



Cleopatra, black? Excuse my Greek but you’re talking out of your asp

I have been reluctant to comment on the controversy over the upcoming Netflix docudrama *Queen Cleopatra*. For those who don’t know, the fact that a black woman, Adele James, is playing Cleopatra has annoyed everyone from scholars of Egyptian antiquity to modern-day Greeks and Egyptians.

Cleopatra was not of sub-Saharan African descent, as we now typically understand the term “black” to mean, but of Greek origin. But describing someone from the

ancient past as black or white is anachronistic anyway. The Greeks thought everyone who didn’t speak their language was a barbarian.

I have been reluctant to comment because I don’t think I could add anything to the discussion. But a recent article in *The New York Times* fascinated me. Gwen Nally, an assistant professor of philosophy and Mary Hamil Gilbert, an assistant professor of classics, argue that Cleopatra was “culturally black”. By this they mean she was “part of a culture and

history that has known oppression and triumph, exploitation and survival”.

It is bizarre to view “blackness” as a synonym for the experience of oppression. Because that means Irish people are black, Jewish people are black, countless Asian ethnic groups are black, Armenians are black, women are black, gay people are black ... Welcome to the club, all of you! And to any group I have missed out, I apologise; I can’t fit all of you in. The boat is already getting creaky.

● I visited Glasgow for the first time last week. I was first struck by how steep the roads were. As I was walking to my hotel late at night, I thought desperately: “Am I in Glasgow or San Francisco?!” My legs felt sore after a 15-minute walk from the station to the hotel, and I greatly regretted not calling a taxi. Thankfully, the grounded pleasure of ordering a beer and a pack of peanuts in the quiet hotel bar compensated for any pain I had hitherto felt.

Walking around the city the very next morning, I was charmed by the late-Victorian style of the architecture; I felt like someone dumped in a Sherlock Holmes novel.

But as I was heading back to the railway station to catch the London train in the afternoon, I walked along Sauchiehall Street and I had a sudden sense of déjà vu. I had seen this all before. There was a Boots. There was a Subway. There was a fish-and-chips place called something like Blue Lagoon. There was also (of course) a Greggs.

The British high street: the great connective thread of our towns and cities.

Whole worlds vanish when a language dies

Gwenno Saunders is a Welsh musician who sings in both Welsh and Cornish (her father is the Cornish poet and linguist Tim Saunders). In 2018 she released an album entirely in Cornish called *Le Kov*. Her music is haunting and melodic; she has a lovely voice. What I admire more than her music, however, is her noble project to promote an endangered language.

Cornish was virtually extinct by the end of the 18th century. There has been a recent movement to revive it, but the number of people who speak the language fluently is less than 1,000.

I believe schools throughout the UK should teach languages such as

Welsh and Cornish: our native tongues. Because a language is not just words. It contains poetry, songs, tales, humour and proverbs; it is a vast treasury of memories and experiences.

About 6,500 languages are spoken around the world, but, according to the website *Our World in Data*, by the end of this century the figure will go down to 3,000. And by the beginning of the 23rd century, only 100 languages will remain.

This sounds dystopian to me. As Saunders said in an interview on ITV a few years ago: “I think it’s the cultural and linguistic differences that make the world so fascinating.” *Dwi’n cytuno*. That’s Welsh for “I agree”.

NEWMAN’S VIEW



A double booked seat

I love reading on public transport. Whenever I have a long journey lined up, I am giddy with the prospect of conquering page after page of a book in one fell swoop.

On the Tube on Thursday I didn’t read a book. But a woman sitting next to me did, and after she left the train, another woman came and sat in the same place, and was reading the same book: *Cleopatra and Frankenstein* by Coco Mellors.

I have no idea what the book is about, but I reflected that it was far better to see the name of Cleopatra on the cover of a novel quietly consumed on public transport than bandied about in a loud and angry debate centred on racial grievances.

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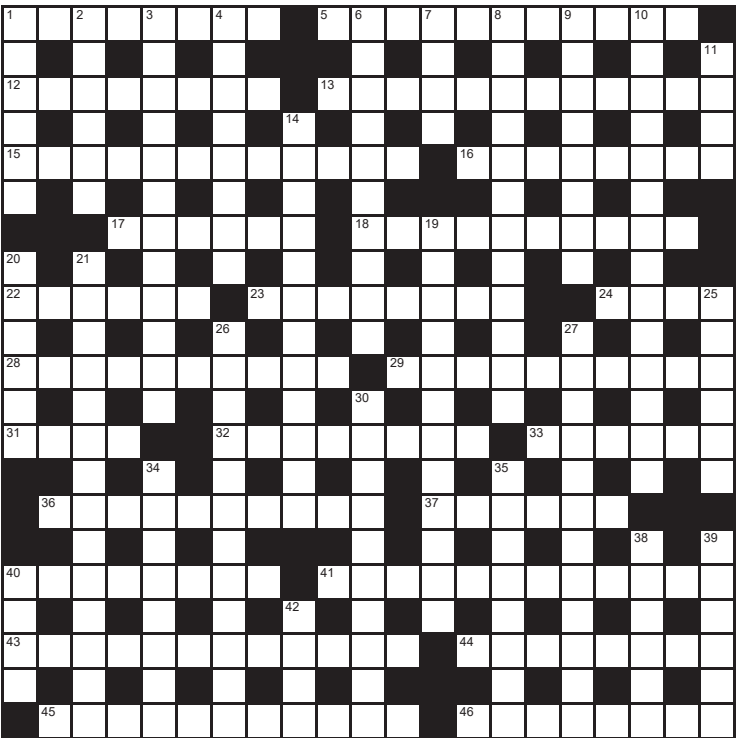
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Across

- 1 Woodland flower sometimes called wild hyacinth (8)
5 “In proportion, as the bourgeoisie grows in wealth, the ___ grows in numbers” (Friedrich Engels) (11)
12 Joseph Conrad novel; Ripley’s spaceship in Alien (8)
13 Pop princess who sang with Nick Cave on the murder ballad Where the Wild Roses Grow (1995) (5,7)
15 Yearly event that marks a failed 1605 regicide attempt (7,5)
16 “All is not well. I doubt some ___” (Hamlet) (4,4)
17 Edible brown-skinned flatfish with orange or red dots (6)
18 ___ plays DI Neville Parker in BBC TV’s Death in Paradise (4,6)
22 Roman leader who invaded Britain in 55BC and 54BC (6)
23 Fungus, for example (8)
24 Loose name for a small insect which may bite (4)
28 A person who would call the Granite City their home (10)
29 In the Second World War, “Stuka” was an abbreviation of the German for ___ (4-6)
31 A word which can be prefixed by tight, guide or tow (4)
32 2006 film based on the life of a martial artist in the last years of the Qing dynasty (8)
33 In a West Sussex nest in 2020, three ___ were the first born in Britain for about 600 years (6)
36 Another name for airships (10)
37 Environmental activist (pictured) who conducted a 1996 tunnel-based protest against the expansion of the A30 in Devon (6)
40 Type of shoe historically worn by native Americans (8)
41 Illness often diagnosed by pain at McBurney’s point (12)
43 In the 1970s, Robert ___’s photography focused on the gay sexual subculture of New York (12)
44 The sauce for this kind of curry usually includes green chilli, onions and tomatoes (8)
45 Indulging in plunder and pillage (11)
46 Stephen ___ was a co-writer and co-director of The Office, with Ricky Gervais (8)



Down

- 1 Great ape native to part of the Congo basin (6)
2 Adjective that could be used to describe Paddington (6)
3 Cue sport which can be played normally with two sides of the table against walls (3,9)
4 Tolerated something unpleasant (6,2)
6 Blind jazz/blues pianist man who had a 1960 hit with Georgia on my Mind (3,7)
7 ___ and Vilnius were the largest cities in the Second Polish Republic that later became cities of the USSR (4)
8 Actor and star of the 2010-14 BBC sitcom Rev (3,9)
9 Hairstyle famously worn by child star Shirley Temple (pictured) (8)
10 ___ starred in 264 episodes of Murder, She Wrote (6,8)
11 “I’m a model, you know what I mean. And I do my little turn on the catwalk.” (I’m Too ___, Right Said Fred) (4)
14 To act in a way inviting disaster (4,3,1,4)
19 The hypothalamus and amygdalae are parts of the ___ (6,6)
20 Comedian Jenny ___ was pleasingly named for her 2012 Celebrity Masterchef appearance (6)
21 The ___ was a 1969 book about promotion, intended to be satire (5,9)
25 The rufous-bellied ___ is Brazil’s national bird (6)
26 Not officially connected with an organisation (12)
27 Musical featuring the songs Happy Talk and Some Enchanted Evening (5,7)
30 Coated abrasive used for smoothing and polishing (10)
34 Originally American term for someone operating deviously (8)
35 A fork-rooted plant once said to have magical powers (8)
38 In Greek myth, counterpart of the goddess Minerva (6)
39 “Never corner an opponent, and always ___ him to save his face” (Liddell Hart) (6)
40 Operatic character whose tiny hand was frozen (4)
42 Liquid produced by mashing in beer and whisky making (4)



SUDOKU

Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. Winners will receive a Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus.

To enter, complete the Very Hard puzzle and call 0901 292 5275 (UK only) (ROI 1516 303 500), leaving your answer (the numbers in the three shaded squares) and contact details. Or text SUNDAY2, followed by a space, then your answer (three numbers) and contact details — eg SUNDAY2 123 John Smith, etc — to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1.00 (ROI £1.50) plus your telephone company’s network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. Winners will be picked at random from all correct answers received. Lines close at midnight on Saturday. If you call or text after this time you will not be entered but may be charged. When entering by phone or text, please provide your FULL name and address details, as incomplete entries may be charged but not entered. **STUCK?** Call our clue line to get four clues for the Very Hard puzzle on 0901 293 6265 (ROI 1514 515 120). Calls cost £1 (ROI 76c) plus your telephone company’s network access charge. For full terms and conditions, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/comrules. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm)

WARM-UP

				8				6
		3	7	6				5
		2		3				4
8		5	9					
9			3		4			5
					1	2		9
7				6				4
	5				7	3	9	
3				9				

VERY HARD — PRIZE 1535

				1	3			4
5					4	8	3	6
	8				2		7	9
9				5				8
6	1		8				2	
1	3	6	9					7
	2		6	7				

KILLER SUDOKU EASY

12		10		8		14		7
22		20				17	10	
			18	7				16
17	10				20	3		
		14		10			20	
	7				12			16
			11		7		19	
14		17			15			
	18				4		10	

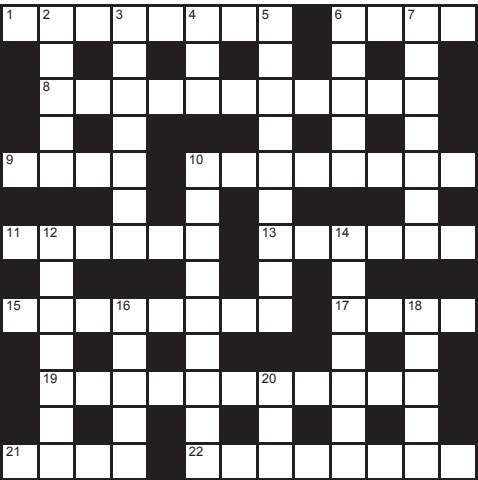
Each row, column and 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. The digits within each group of cells joined by dotted lines must add up to the figure in the top-left-hand corner of each group. Within each dotted-line group, a digit cannot be repeated.

POLYGON



From these letters, make words of four or more letters, always including the central letter. Answers must be in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, excluding capitalised words, plurals, conjugated verbs (past tense etc), adverbs ending in LY, comparatives and superlatives. **How you rate** 19 words, average; 26, good; 37, very good; 48, excellent.

CONCISE CROSSWORD 1834



Across

- 1 Mulish (8)
6 Bounding stride (4)
8 Glorious (11)
9 Nil (4)
10 Mutton kebab (8)
11 Sooner or later, eg (6)
13 Diplomatic agents (6)
15 Serene (8)
17 Demonstrate (4)
19 Not to be broken (11)
21 Alluring (4)
22 Appeal (8)

Down

- 2 Convulsion (5)
3 Made to order (7)
4 Pussycat’s partner (3)
5 Peerless (9)
6 Aquatic bloodsucker (5)
7 Turn to stone (7)
10 Conquer (9)
12 Field rodents (7)
14 Apparent (7)
16 Clever (5)
18 Plain (5)
20 Eviscerate (3)

MEPHISTO 3272

John Grimshaw

1		2		3	4		5	6	7	8
9	10				11					
12										
			13							
14					15	16				17
18										19
			20	21				22		
23										
24	25				26	27				
28		29								
31					30					
32										
33										

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____

Post your solution to The Sunday Times Mephisto 3272, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex CO2 8GZ, or email puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk

The first correct solution picked at random after next Saturday wins Collins World Atlas: Complete Edition, worth £30. The next four will receive £20 Waterstones gift vouchers. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.

The Chambers Dictionary 13th edition is the primary reference. Readers may email comments or queries to puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk



CODEWORD

17	7	5	9	13		4			13	5	17	5	23
5			11		24	11	14	20	1		5		7
12	1	25	12	24					9	5	11	9	5
16		5			21	1	3	18	9		20		17
24	10	12	5			20			25		2	1	17
		12		16	11	5	15	14	1	12			11
20	14	9	5			17			11		14	12	24
		11			25	24	18	12	14	9	13		25
9	11	24	1			1			9		1	17	7
19			3			22	1	15	1	11		7	
18	21	14	25	1			14			14	13	5	16
5			6			20	1	21	5	11		13	
22	1	1	26	8			16			25	5	2	14

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

In the grid, each number represents a letter of the alphabet – all 26 letters are used. Use the initial clues in the code table to work out the rest of the code. **STUCK?** To get four random extra letter clues, call 0901 293 6266 (ROI 1514 415128) or text STCLUE to 64343 (UK only). Calls cost £1 (ROI 75c) plus your telephone company’s network access charge. Texts cost £1 plus your standard network charge. SP: Spoke, 0333 202 3390 (ROI 0818 205 403) (Mon-Fri 9am-5.30pm).

KENKEN

5-		40x			10+
1-		18+			
5+	9+			10+	
	11+				3-
30x					
		5-	8+		3÷

All the digits 1 to 6 must appear in every row and column. In each thick-line “block”, the target number in the top left-hand corner is calculated from the digits in all the cells in the block, using the operation indicated by the symbol.

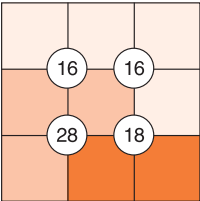
CLUE WRITING CONTEST 1968: CENTAUR

You are invited to write a clue for the word above, in our cryptic crossword style. The best entry selected after next Saturday wins a £25 Waterstones voucher. Email your entry to puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk.

FEEDBACK

Comments about our puzzles can be sent to puzzle.feedback@sunday-times.co.uk or Puzzles Editor, The Sunday Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

SUKO



Place the numbers 1 to 9 in the spaces so that the number in each circle is equal to the sum of the four surrounding spaces, and each colour total is correct.

CELL BLOCKS



Divide the grid into square or rectangular blocks, each containing one digit only. Every block must contain the number of cells indicated by the digit inside it.

Winner 1965: Richard Warren, Coventry
Bellows: Howls of pain as flailing left elbow connects with striker’s head

For a full report, visit thesundaytimes.co.uk/cluewriting

The first correct solution opened after next Saturday wins a collection of reference books — The Times Universal Atlas of the World, Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus, and Bradford’s Crossword Solver’s Dictionary, published by HarperCollins. Three runners-up win the Collins English Dictionary & Thesaurus. Post solutions to: The Sunday Times Crossword 5059, PO Box 29, Colchester, Essex, CO2 8GZ, or email: puzzle.entries@sunday-times.co.uk. Open to 18+ UK & ROI residents only.











LOUIS VUITTON

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Sunday, May 14, 2023

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MAR, 2025

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Ultimate South America with Iguazu Falls and Machu Picchu



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12 night all-inclusive cruise on board Celebrity Eclipse®

Classic Drinks Package, Wi-Fi and Tips

Visiting: Lima, Palomino Islands, Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu, Cusco, Santiago, Valparaíso, Chilean Fjords (scenic cruising), Strait of Magellan (scenic cruising), Punta Arenas, Ushuaia, Cape Horn (scenic cruising), Puerto Madryn, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Iguazu, Rio de Janeiro

Fully Escorted Tours

Complimentary Palomino Islands tour

Sacred Valley tour including:

Salt Mines of Maras

Moray and Ollantaytambo Ruins

Machu Picchu tour

Buenos Aires city tour

Walking tour of Iguazu Falls including both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides of the falls

Tour of Christ the Redeemer

Hotel Stays

Four-star hotel stays in Lima, Cusco, Santiago, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro with breakfast

Five-star hotel stays in Iguazu and Sacred Valley with breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure)

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VERANDA *from*
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CONCIERGE CLASS *from*
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Embrace South America’s awe-inspiring landscapes, fascinating culture and diverse attractions, during a luxurious Celebrity voyage and unforgettable tours.

Your thrilling South America holiday begins with a three-night hotel stay in Lima, complete with a wonderful city tour and unforgettable Palomino Island tour, where you’ll be gifted close encounters of sea lions. You’ll then explore the fascinating Incan ruins of the Sacred Valley and savour a tour of Machu Picchu, an awe-inspiring ancient city perched on a mountaintop.

Following a two-night hotel stay in Santiago, your adventure continues as you embark the exceptional Celebrity Eclipse® for a voyage brimming with bustling cities, jaw-dropping waterways, and icy landscapes. Highlights of your cruise include Puerto Madryn, a city known for its gorgeous wildlife and stunning landscapes; picturesque Ushuaia, nestled at the southern tip of South America, and a scenic cruise through the stunning channels of the Strait of Magellan.

You’ll disembark in Buenos Aires and spend two nights soaking up its vibrancy and breathing in its fusion of European and Latin culture. A three-night hotel stay in Iguazu follows. Here, you’ll embrace two fully escorted tours of the misty Iguazu Falls from both its Brazilian and Argentinian sides. As you traverse this iconic sight, you’ll marvel at the striking landscapes, fascinating wildlife, and tepid rainforests that encompass it.

A two-night hotel stay in Brazil’s vivid and colourful capital city, Rio de Janeiro, awaits, paired with a tour that includes a visit to the embracing Christ the Redeemer statue which overlooks the city.



Discover the incredible Iguazu Falls

Marvel at the largest waterfall system in the world, bordered by lush vegetation, looped with walking trails. Surrounded by tropical rainforest where colourful toucans reside, you’ll be accompanied by the distant roar of one of the most spectacular waterfalls in the world.

You’ll get to experience the Iguazu Falls from both the Brazilian and Argentinian sides and get right up close to this magnificent spectacle, comprised of more than 275 falls, the tallest of which towers more than 82 metres high.

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Luxury cruise on board *Silver Shadow*

Authentic experiences. Simple pleasures. Shared moments. Silversea's Millennium Class luxury ship *Silver Shadow* offers you the freedom and space to enjoy your cruise holiday the way you want it. *Silver Shadow* retains Silversea's essence – spacious suites, a complement of only 382 guests, superior service - paired with a lively cosmopolitan atmosphere and enhanced amenities.

SILVERSEA®

SAVE UP TO
£2,500
PER COUPLE⁺

COMPLIMENTARY
LUXURY FIVE-STAR
TAHITI HOTEL STAY

Discover the tranquil French Polynesian islands during a five-star Tahitian retreat and a six-star, all-inclusive Silversea cruise.

Arriving in paradisaal Tahiti – the largest of the French Polynesian islands – you'll begin your unforgettable holiday with four luxurious nights at the remarkable InterContinental® Tahiti Resort & Spa. Here, you're afforded stunning views of the island and spacious rooms and suites to unwind in come evening. Relish fine dining at opulent restaurants and bars, as well as a spa and private beach.

You'll then join Silversea's *Silver Shadow* for your opulent sailing of the breathtaking French Polynesia and Cook Islands, savouring expansive all-suite accommodation, opulent lounges, superior personalised service, and first-class amenities on board.

Some of the highlights of your voyage include calls to Fakarava, home to captivating exotic wildlife, and Nuku Hiva, where deep valleys meet rolling landscapes. Stunningly remote Rangiroa follows, where you'll encounter turquoise waters teeming with underwater life, and romantic Bora Bora, an island dotted with inviting fabled lagoons and some of the world's most spectacular sunsets.

You'll then uncover Raiatea's treasure trove of rugged beauty, followed by the endlessly intriguing Mo'orea Island, where you'll enjoy one of many warm welcomes, being greeted with traditional music and dance.

Return to Pape'ete, where you'll disembark and savour a final night's stay where your holiday began – the InterContinental® Tahiti Resort & Spa – before your return flight beckons. The combination of luxurious accommodations, stunning destinations, and warm hospitality makes this an unforgettable holiday of a lifetime.



Five-star hotel stay at the InterContinental® Tahiti Resort & Spa

With dramatic volcanic peaks and an aquamarine lagoon backdropping expansive verdant gardens, InterContinental® Tahiti Resort & Spa offers a sumptuous stay, synonymous with paradise.

The perfect place to begin and end your luxurious getaway, here, you'll discover beautiful pools and an indulgent spa provide stylish ways to relax. The Te Tiare Restaurant serves delicious Polynesian cuisine while the Le Lotus Restaurants serves a gourmet menu in a stunning overwater venue.

18 Nights
Departing March 9, 2025

This *amazing* holiday includes:

All-Inclusive Cruise

13 night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Shadow*

Visiting: Tahiti, Fakarava Atoll, Atuona, Nuku Hiva, Rangiroa, Bora Bora, Aitutaki, Rarotonga, Mo'orea Island, Tahiti

- Complimentary premium shore excursions included at every port*
- Pre-paid gratuities and complimentary Wi-Fi on board
- In-suite butler service and fully stocked fridge for all suites
- All-inclusive beverages including fine wines, beers and premium spirits

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stay

Five-night five-star hotel stay at the InterContinental® Tahiti Resort & Spa with breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

VISTA SUITE *from*
£7,499^{PP}

CLASSIC VERANDA SUITE *from*
£8,499^{PP}

SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE *from*
£8,799^{PP}

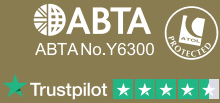
DELUXE VERANDA SUITE *from*
£9,499^{PP}

*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only. +Prices shown include discount and savings are based on booking directly with Imagine Cruising.



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **AUS7389**

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TIMES Travel Offers

Sunday, May 14, 2023

In partnership with Imagine Cruising®

18 NIGHTS
FROM
£4,199^{PP}

From the Forbidden City to Mount Fuji: China and Japan explorer



Board the *exquisite* Queen Elizabeth

When the late Queen Elizabeth II conducted the naming ceremony in her own honour in October 2010, she continued a marvellously regal formal cruising tradition. Cunard has maintained all the refined styling, amenities and service associated with the Golden Era of cruise sailing and added modern facilities, leisure and entertainment opportunities.

COMPLIMENTARY
OCEANVIEW TO
BALCONY
UPGRADE

COMPLIMENTARY
FULLY ESCORTED
TOUR OF MOUNT
FUJI AND TOKYO
HOTEL STAY

18 Nights
Departing March 13, 2025

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise
Nine-night full-board cruise on board Queen Elizabeth
Complimentary Oceanview to Balcony upgrade
Visiting: Hong Kong, Manila, Hualien, Keelung, Kagoshima, Tokyo

Fully Escorted Tours
Great Wall of China and Summer Palace
Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City and Tian'anmen square
Terracotta Warriors
Complimentary tour of Mount Fuji including the Hakone Ropeway cable car
Complimentary boat trip across Lake Ashi
Complimentary high-speed bullet train to Tokyo

Hotel Stays
Three-night five-star stay in Beijing at the Kuntai Hotel or similar with breakfast
Two-night five-star hotel stay at the Wyndham Grand Xi'an South or similar with breakfast
One-night five-star hotel stay in Hong Kong the Harbour Grand Kowloon or similar
Complimentary two-night four-star hotel stay at the Grand Nikko Tokyo Daiba or similar

All Flights and Transfers
(London departure - regional flights available)

INSIDE <i>from</i> £4,199 ^{PP}	OCEANVIEW <i>from</i> £5,199 ^{PP}
BALCONY <i>from</i> £5,199 ^{PP}	GRILL SUITE <i>from</i> £6,999 ^{PP}



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **ASA7799**

From China's ancient wonders to Japan's magnificent landscapes, explore the best these intriguing destinations have to offer during fully escorted tours, paired with a luxury Cunard cruise.

Embark on an unforgettable holiday with an adventure through China and Japan, discovering some of the most iconic landmarks and breathtaking scenery these destinations have to offer. Your journey begins in Beijing, where you will spend three nights exploring the vibrant city. Wander through the sprawling Forbidden City, surrounded by opulent imperial gardens and shrines.

Next, transfer to Xi'an to embark on an elusive Terracotta Army tour, where you'll be amazed by over 8,000 life-like soldier sculptures. Afterward, board Cunard's majestic Queen Elizabeth and set sail on a magnificent cruise. Highlights of the trip include visiting Hualien, Taiwan, where you can witness the beautiful Taroko National Park in full bloom and explore Keelung's unique blend of Japanese-era buildings and modern skyscrapers.

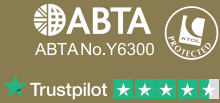
As the cruise concludes, disembark in Yokohama and enjoy a final two-night stay in Tokyo. Take a memorable Mount Fuji tour and be awed by Japan's natural beauty. With a mix of vibrant cities, cultural landmarks, and stunning scenery, this journey is sure to be unforgettable. From the iconic landmarks of China to the breathtaking scenery of Japan, this trip will leave you with memories to last a lifetime.



Discover Terracotta Army

Xi'an is world-renowned for its remarkable Terracotta Army, which is considered one of the most mysterious and awe-inspiring creations on the planet. This incredible archaeological discovery was made when farmers were digging a well, and upon further investigation, an astonishing number of life-sized soldiers were found. Each statue has their own unique feature, including hairstyles, expressions, and armour, and they encircle the tomb of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China.

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19 NIGHTS
FROM
£5,999^{PP}

No-fly luxury Cunard voyage, Italian Lakes and all-inclusive Venice Simplon-Orient-Express



Board the regal Queen Victoria

There's something distinctly refined and regal about a Cunard cruise and the beautiful Queen Victoria certainly upholds the fine traditions of this luxury line. Even before you board this beautiful ship you'll note the trademark black and red livery which, together with her sleek modern design, immediately sets the theme of proud cruising heritage married with innovative features for today's cruise guests.



CUNARD

SAVE UP TO
£2,800
PER COUPLE*

COMPLIMENTARY EIGHT-NIGHT FULLY ESCORTED ITALIAN LAKES TOURS

19 Nights
Departing May 5, 2024

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

Eight-night full-board cruise on board Queen Victoria

Complimentary Oceanview to Balcony upgrade

Visiting: Southampton, Cádiz, Málaga, Palma de Mallorca, Civitavecchia

Rail Journeys

Complimentary scenic rail journey through the Swiss Alps on board the Bernina Express

Two-day full-board luxury Venice Simplon-Orient-Express train journey from Verona to Paris
Standard Premier Eurostar rail journey from Paris to London

Hotel Stays

Two-night four-star stay in Florence
Complimentary four-star hotel stays in Lake Maggiore, Lake Como and Lake Garda
All hotel stays include breakfast

All Transfers

EXCLUSIVE TO IMAGINE CRUISING

INSIDE *from*
£5,999^{PP}

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BALCONY *from*
£6,999^{PP}

GRILL SUITE *from*
£8,999^{PP}

*Prices include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Grill Suite.



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **MED7689**

Embark Cunard's elegant Queen Victoria, delve into the wondrous Italian Lakes, and savour a timeless journey on board the Luxury Venice Simplon-Orient-Express.

You'll begin your enchanting holiday in Southampton and embark the peerless Queen Victoria. Throughout your cruise, you'll relish luxurious cabins, gourmet dining, and grand ballrooms in between calls to Europe's most charming destinations. You'll stop in the richly diverse city of Cádiz; cultural Málaga – the birthplace of famous artists including Picasso – and picturesque Palma de Mallorca, where you could indulge in delicious tapas before strolling the city's picturesque streets.

Next, you'll disembark in Civitavecchia and explore Florence's centuries-old architecture during a two-night stay and next, enjoy scenic waterfront walks during your tour of the Italian Lakes.

In Lake Maggiore, you'll encounter vibrant villages and savour sumptuous Italian cuisine before transferring to vivid Lake Como – set against the backdrop of the Rhaetian Alps. Here, you'll experience stunning mountain scenery on the Bernina Express as you travel to St. Moritz. Next, in charming Lake Garda, you'll relish a three-night hotel stay and explore its narrow cobbled streets, gaze up at decadent Renaissance architecture, and stroll through its verdant gardens.

You'll then transfer to Verona and embark the luxurious Venice Simplon-Orient-Express. During your journey to Paris, you'll indulge in exceptional cuisine – prepared using the finest regional ingredients – with a three-course lunch. You could then savour a refreshing drink at the champagne bar before you'll conclude your journey in Paris and return home on board the Eurostar.



Relax on board Venice Simplon-Orient-Express

The Venice Simplon-Orient-Express is a highly sought-after luxury train journey that offers an immersive experience echoing the golden age of travel. With opulent décor, gourmet dining, and unparalleled service, this journey takes you through Europe's most stunning landscapes.

Iconic carriages, timeless elegance, and attention to detail make it an unforgettable experience – it's no wonder that this train is considered one of the most luxurious in the world.

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Opening Hours: Mon to Sun: 9am to 8pm

14 NIGHTS
FROM
£2,599^{PP*}

Barbados escape and intimate Royal Clipper voyage



Intimate cruise on board **Royal Clipper**

Royal Clipper elicits admiring looks wherever it goes, and its interiors are equally impressive. It provides an intimate and luxurious experience while its amenities combine modern conveniences with timeless touches. From the sumptuous setting of the library to the underwater portholes of the Captain Nemo Lounge and a crow's nest from which you can admire the views, it's a ship that provides a thrilling and memorable nautical adventure.

**COMPLIMENTARY
ALL-INCLUSIVE
HOTEL
UPGRADE***

**FURTHER REDUCTIONS:
SAVE UP TO
£2,400
PER COUPLE^**

Spend seven nights in utter bliss during a Barbados beach escape before taking an intimate cruise around the Caribbean with Royal Clipper.

Barbados, a haven of sprawling white sandy beaches, twinkling azure waters and verdant palm forests, is where your adventure begins. Savour a seven-night hotel stay and soak up Barbados' pristine views of towering palm trees that whisper in the breeze, turquoise waters and indulge in the luxuries of this beautiful island.

In Bridgetown, witness the most prestigious horse racing events at the Garrison Savannah or explore the historic sites. Admire the city's grand historic architecture or explore George Washington House, the same house and surroundings where the first U.S. president stayed on his visit to Barbados.

Following your stay, you'll settle in for an extraordinary seven-night cruise on board the magnificent Royal Clipper. On board there's every luxury you could possibly imagine, from an elegant three-tiered dining room serving gourmet dishes to a well-stocked library and a spa. Your magical voyage will include the chance to discover the beautiful islands of the Caribbean such as St Lucia, Grenada and Martinique, before you disembark back in Barbados.



Seven-night hotel stay in Barbados

Arriving in Barbados, you'll be transferred to your hotel to begin your stay on this postcard-perfect island. After a day of exploring, relax on Barbados' serene beaches, with warm inviting waves gently lapping the shore, and lofty palm trees swaying in the Caribbean breeze.

The Sugar Cane Club Hotel & Spa is enveloped in lush landscapes and views of the Caribbean Sea, and you'll discover tranquillity and intimate seclusion to help you embrace the laidback Bajan way of life.

**14 Nights
Departing Dec, 2023 - Mar, 2024**

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

Seven-night full-board cruise on board Royal Clipper

- Enjoy a traditional sail-powered seafaring experience
- Relish a relaxed ambience with an easy-going dress code
- Intimate atmosphere with a capacity for just 227 passengers

Visiting*: Barbados, Captain's Best (Grenadines), St. George's (Grenada), Tobago Cays (Grenadines), Kingstown (St. Vincent), Admiralty Bay (Bequia), Fort-de-France (Martinique), St. Lucia, Barbados

Hotel Stay

Seven-night four-star hotel stay in Barbados at the Sugar Cane Club Hotel And Spa

*Book an Outside cabin or above and receive an all-inclusive hotel stay

All flights and transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

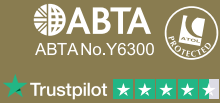
INSIDE <i>from*</i> £2,599^{PP}	OUTSIDE <i>from*</i> £3,199^{PP}
SUPERIOR OUTSIDE <i>from*</i> £3,699^{PP}	SUITE <i>from*</i> £4,999
SOLO PASSENGER <i>from*</i> £4,299	

Prices are per person based on two adults sharing a cruise cabin or suite and include flights from London (regional flights available at a supplement). *Prices and itinerary based on December 9, 2023 departure. ^Prices shown include discount and savings are based on two passengers sharing an Inside (Cat 6) cabin departing December 9, 2023.



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: AME7539

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TIMES TravelOffers



38 NIGHTS
FROM
£3,199_{PP}

An epic Cunard voyage from Singapore to Southampton



The Queen Mary 2 Experience

Quite simply, the Queen Mary 2 is the most magnificent ocean liner ever built, so, a fabulous cruise holiday on this wonderful ship is an experience of a lifetime. Cunard have incorporated the very latest in modern facilities, entertainment and enrichment opportunities into a ship radiating the opulence, charm and glamour of cruising's Golden Era. Your fine dining options include gourmet delights with classy touches.



CUNARD

SAVE OVER
£2,900
PER COUPLE⁺

**COMPLIMENTARY
FLIGHT AND HOTEL
STAY IN SINGAPORE**

38 Nights
Departing March 21, 2024

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

36 night full-board cruise on board Queen Mary 2

Visiting: Singapore, Penang, Langkawi, Phuket, Colombo, Doha, Dubai (overnight in port), Salalah, Aqaba, Suez Canal (scenic cruising), Athens, Barcelona, Cádiz, Southampton

- There's never a dull moment with West End-style productions at the Royal Court Theatre, a full live music programme, karaoke and quiz nights, plus ballroom dancing in the Queens Room
- Enjoy a show at the planetarium, take part in fencing, relax in the Mareel Spa or sign up for the outstanding Insight programme
- From classic British and French in the Britannia and Grills restaurants to the best steak onboard at The Verandah, plus daily traditional afternoon tea and a range of cuisines at Kings Court Buffet, there's something to suit every taste

Complimentary Hotel Stay

Two-night four-star stay in Singapore at the Orchard Rendezvous Hotel with breakfast

Complimentary Outbound Flight

(London departure - regional flights available)

Immerse yourself in the otherworldly charms of Singapore before embarking Queen Mary 2 for an epic voyage, taking in the wonders of Asia, Arabia, and the Mediterranean.

Your epic adventure begins with a two-night, four-star hotel stay in Singapore. A city of curious contrasts and exotic fusions. Lose yourself in the colourful otherworldly structures at Gardens by the Bay, embark on a bumboat river cruise through sapphire waters taking in the striking landmarks of the city, or escape to Kusu Island, a stunning turtle habitat with ornate shrines and glorious beaches.

Next, you'll embark the regal Queen Mary 2 for your spellbinding cruise to Southampton. The flagship of the remarkable Cunard fleet, this exquisite ocean liner radiates with the charm and glamour of cruising's golden era, blended with modern conveniences. Enjoy a traditional Afternoon Tea served by white-gloved waiters, don your finest attire at a themed Gala Evening or challenge your fellow passengers to a deck game or two.

You'll then set sail for your 36-night cruise exploring in the colours, cultures and contrasts of Asia, Arabia, and the Mediterranean. Highlights include the beautiful beaches and relaxed culture of idyllic Phuket, an overnight in port in Dubai – a city brimming with glittering skyscrapers and sacred temples, and a scenic cruise through the magnificent Suez Canal, which connects the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea.

A mesmerising journey affording unforgettable sights, sounds, experiences, cultures and cuisines, you'll finally arrive in Southampton, where your holiday draws to an end.



Explore Dubai

Immerse yourself in the glamour of Dubai, where all that glitters truly is gold. Here you'll meet sparkling skyscrapers, glitzy shops, and sun-soaked beaches, making it the ideal destination to enjoy a well-rounded break.

Alongside the charisma, you'll find a rich tradition and fascinating history; lose yourself in the charming narrow streets of the Bastakia Quarter, also known as Dubai's historic heart or savour an abra cruise along the beautiful creek.

LAST CHANCE TO BOOK

INSIDE *from*
£3,199_{PP}

OCEANVIEW *from*
£3,999_{PP}

BALCONY *from*
£4,899_{PP}

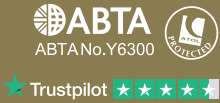
GRILL SUITE *from*
£11,499_{PP}

Transfers are available at an additional cost. +Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Grill Suite.



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: REP7428

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TIMES TravelOffers

Sunday, May 14, 2023


In partnership with Imagine Cruising®

All-inclusive Eastern Mediterranean Silversea voyage and luxury Crete escape





SAVE UP TO
£5,400
PER COUPLE^



SILVER SPIRIT

17 Nights from £4,499pp+
Departing Sept and Oct, 2023

This amazing holiday includes:

All-Inclusive Cruise

11 night all-inclusive luxury cruise on board *Silver Spirit*

Visiting+: Athens, Kuşadası, Bodrum, Rhodes, Antalya, Hafia (overnight in port), Ashdod, Agios Nikolaos, Santorini, Athens

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stays

One-night five-star stay at the NJV Athens Plaza Hotel with breakfast

Five-night five-star ultra all-inclusive hotel stay in Crete at the Mitsis Laguna Resort & Spa

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure- regional flights)

SIX-STAR ALL-INCLUSIVE VOYAGE WITH COMPLIMENTARY SHORE EXCURSIONS*

PRICES FROM

VISTA SUITE

£4,499pp+

VERANDA SUITE


£5,299pp+

SUPERIOR VERANDA SUITE

£5,699pp+


DELUXE VERANDA SUITE


£5,999pp+

 ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7656


*Offer includes one excursion per guest, per port/day. Additional excursions available at an extra charge. ^Prices shown include discount and savings based on booking directly with Imagine Cruising. +Prices and itinerary based on October 12, 2023 departure.

Cunard Queen Anne voyage and all-inclusive Maldives escape





CRUISE ON BOARD CUNARD'S BRAND-NEW QUEEN ANNE



QUEEN ANNE

21 Nights from £5,499pp
Departing March 23, 2025

This amazing holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

13 night full-board cruise on board the brand-new Queen Anne

Visiting: Singapore, Port Klang, Penang, Colombo, Abu Dhabi, Dubai (overnight in port)

Hotel Stays

Two-night five-star hotel stay at the Dusit Thani Laguna Singapore or similar with breakfast

One-night five-star stay at the JW Marriott Marquis Hotel Dubai or similar

Five-night all-inclusive four-star hotel stay in the Maldives at the OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

FIVE-NIGHT ALL-INCLUSIVE MALDIVES HOTEL STAY

PRICES FROM

INSIDE

£5,499pp

OCEANVIEW


£5,999pp

BALCONY

£6,999pp

GRILL SUITE

£10,999pp

 ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7798

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Trustpilot

★★★★★

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18 NIGHTS
FROM
£5,499^{PP}

Cunard Alaska voyage, Rocky Mountaineer and Calgary Stampede



Board the *exquisite* Queen Elizabeth

When the late Queen Elizabeth II conducted the naming ceremony in her own honour in October 2010, she continued a marvellously regal formal cruising tradition. Cunard has maintained all the refined styling, amenities and service associated with the Golden Era of cruise sailing and added modern facilities, leisure and entertainment opportunities.

**JUST LAUNCHED
FOR JUNE 2024**

**TWO-DAY TICKET
TO THE CALGARY
STAMPEDE**

Enjoy an unforgettable Alaskan voyage and opulent Rocky Mountaineer rail journey through the Canadian Rockies before embracing the ‘Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth,’ the Calgary Stampede.

Your holiday begins with a night in the breathtaking oceanfront city of Vancouver before you'll embark Cunard's regal Queen Elizabeth for your intriguing ten-night Alaskan voyage. Revel in Cunard's iconic standard of luxury, from white-gloved waiters serving Afternoon Tea, to decadent Gala Evenings.

Discover Ketchikan's Indigenous heritage, glimpse bald eagles in Juneau, and marvel at Hubbard Glacier, North America's largest glacier – gifting you awe-inspiring vistas and abundant wildlife, before disembarking in Vancouver.

In Vancouver, you'll savour a further hotel stay before embarking the astounding Rocky Mountaineer, for a luxury rail journey that glides into the heart of the Canadian Rockies. Discover stunning sights, from dramatic gorges to sparkling lakes, from the opulent surrounds of this lavish vessel's carriages and during a stop in Kamloops. Disembarking in Banff, breathe in the crisp mountain air of Banff National Park and marvel at the revered Lake Louise during a fully escorted tour and two-night stay.

Finally, you'll transfer to Calgary, for a three-night Wild West escape. Here, you'll attend the iconic Calgary Stampede, considered 'The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth', as well as relish time at leisure to explore. During your two-day experience, you'll witness a host of jaw-dropping events with lively rodeos, adrenaline-inducing bull riding and scintillating live acts, as well as sampling mouth-watering North American snacks.



Rail journey on board Rocky Mountaineer

One of the world's most extraordinary train journeys, Rocky Mountaineer delves deep into some of Canada's most awe-inspiring landscapes. On a journey through the iconic Canadian Rockies, watch in awe as emerald forests unfurl and hem in icy blue rivers that snake through dramatic gorges.

With the option to upgrade to Rocky Mountaineer's GoldLeaf service, you could experience undulating panoramas of the sublime Canadian Rockies through the train's full glass-dome windows.

18 Nights
Departing June 20, 2024

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise
Ten-night full-board cruise on board Queen Elizabeth
Visiting: Vancouver, Ketchikan, Tracy Arm Fjord (scenic cruising), Juneau, Haines, Hubbard Glacier (scenic cruising), Sitka, Victoria, Vancouver,

Fully Escorted Tours
Banff National Park tour including a visit to Lake Louise
Two-day ticket to the Calgary Stampede

Rail Journey
Two-day luxury Rocky Mountaineer rail journey from Vancouver to Banff
Optional upgrade to GoldLeaf service

Hotel Stays
Two-night four-star hotel stay in Vancouver at the DOUGLAS, Autograph Collection or similar
One-night four-star hotel stay in Kamloops
Two-night four-star hotel stay at the Banff Caribou Lodge & Spa or similar
Three-night four-star hotel stay at The Westin Calgary or similar

All flights and transfers
(London departure)

INSIDE <i>from</i> £5,499^{PP}	OCEANVIEW <i>from</i> £5,999^{PP}
BALCONY <i>from</i> £6,499^{PP}	GRILL SUITE <i>from</i> £8,499^{PP}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **AME7584**

Sunday, May 14, 2023

In partnership with Imagine Cruising®

2023 Croatia island-hopping private yacht and magical Montenegro experience

CREATED BY

Imagine

LIMITED TO 36 GUESTS PER SAILING

MS ROKO

Ten Nights from £1,999^{PP}

Departing Jun - Oct, 2023

This amazing holiday includes:

Half-Board Cruise

Seven-night half-board cruise on board MS Roko including Captains Dinner

Visiting: Dubrovnik, Slano, Korčula, Vis, Hvar, Mljet, Elafiti Islands, Dubrovnik

Hotel Stay

Three-night five-star hotel stay in Montenegro at the Maestral Resort & Casino in a Sea View room with breakfast

Enjoy a 50 minute Mediterranean massage during your spa day

Escorted Tours

Korčula Marco Polo tour, Hvar City tour, Mljet National Park walking tour, Dubrovnik walking tour, Boka Bay Cruise, tour of the Old Town in Montenegro and Lovćen National Park tour

Exclusive Events

Experience Dubrovnik Dinner on the Wall

Farewell Gala Dinner at The Citadel in Budva

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

EXCLUSIVE PRIVATE SUNSET DINNER ON DUBROVNIK'S CITY WALLS

PRICES FROM*

OUTSIDE PORTHOLE	OUTSIDE PICTURE WINDOW	UPPER BALCONY	UPPER PREMIUM BALCONY
£1,999 ^{pp}	£2,699 ^{pp}	£2,999 ^{pp}	Sold Out

*Prices based on October 22, 2023 departure. Outside Picture Window prices based on June 18, 2023 departure.

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7558

All-inclusive Dubai escape and highlights of Arabia cruise

MSC CRUISES

SAVE UP TO £1,800 PER COUPLE[^]

MSC VIRTUOSA

Ten Nights from £1,499^{PP**}

Departing Nov, 2023 - Mar, 2024

This amazing holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

Seven-night full-board cruise on board the MSC Virtuosa

Visiting: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sir Bani Yas Island, Dammam, Doha, Dubai (overnight in port)

*Book a Balcony cabin or above and receive a complimentary drinks package and pre-paid gratuities

Hotel Stay

Three-night four-star all-inclusive stay at the Hotel RIU Dubai

All Flights

(London departure - regional flights available)

BOOK A BALCONY OR ABOVE AND RECEIVE A COMPLIMENTARY ALL-INCLUSIVE CRUISE UPGRADE

PRICES FROM**

INTERIOR	OCEAN VIEW	BALCONY	SUITE
£1,499 ^{pp}	£1,699 ^{pp}	£2,099 ^{pp}	£3,299 ^{pp}

ONLINE CRUISE CODE: REP7425

**Prices based on January 17, 2024 departure. ^Prices shown include discount and savings are based on two passengers sharing a Suite departing January 13, 2024

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Luxury Cunard voyage from Sydney to Singapore



SAVE UP TO
£2,500
PER COUPLE*



QUEEN MARY 2

28 Nights from £2,999^{pp}
Departing February 25, 2024

This amazing holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

25 night full-board cruise on board Queen Mary 2

Visiting: Sydney, Cairns, Darwin, Bitung, Hong Kong (overnight in port), Chan May, Nha Trang, Ho Chi Minh City, Singapore (overnight in port)

Complimentary Hotel Stays

Two-night four-star hotel stay in Sydney at the Rydges World Square

One-night five-star hotel stay in Singapore at the Grand Park City Hall

All hotel stays include breakfast

Complimentary Flights and Transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

COMPLIMENTARY FLIGHTS AND HOTEL STAYS IN SYDNEY AND SINGAPORE

PRICES FROM

INSIDE	OCEANVIEW	BALCONY	GRILL SUITE
£2,999 ^{pp}	£3,699 ^{pp}	£4,299 ^{pp}	£9,999 ^{pp}



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7835

*Prices include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Grill Suite.

Ultra all-inclusive Rhodes retreat and Mediterranean voyage



COMPLIMENTARY
FIVE-NIGHT LUXURY
HOTEL STAY IN
RHODES



OOSTERDAM

17 Nights from £2,299^{pp}
Departing Sept - Oct, 2023

This amazing holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

12 night full-board cruise on board Oosterdam

Visiting*: Piraeus (Athens), Dardanelles, Istanbul, Mykonos, Kotor, Naples, Civitavecchia, Livorno, Cannes, Sète, Barcelona

Complimentary Upgrade to Holland America's 'Have It All' package

- Shore Excursions, Beverage Package, Specialty Dining, Wi-Fi

Complimentary Luxury Hotel Stay

Five-night five-star ultra all-inclusive hotel stay at the Rodos Maris Resort & Spa

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure)

INCLUDES DRINKS, SPECIALITY DINING, WI-FI AND MORE

PRICES FROM**

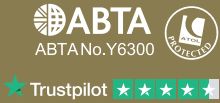
INSIDE	OCEAN VIEW	VERANDAH	SIGNATURE SUITE
£2,299 ^{pp}	£2,699 ^{pp}	£3,199 ^{pp}	£4,599 ^{pp}



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: MED7728

Prices are per person based on two adults sharing a cruise cabin or suite and include flights from London. *Prices and itinerary based on 15 October 2023 departure.

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14 NIGHTS+
FROM
£3,399^{PP+}

Luxury all-inclusive Japan voyage with Autumn Cherry Blossom and Mount Fuji tour



The **Celebrity Millennium®** Experience

Delightful design, with clever use of natural light throughout its public areas, enhances the stunningly attractive ambience of this beautiful cruise ship and promotes an atmosphere of calm openness from the moment you board. The Celebrity Millennium® oozes sophistication and is a superb choice for those looking for a refined and elegant cruise with all the modern facilities you could imagine.

**COMPLIMENTARY
CLASSIC DRINKS,
WI-FI & TIPS
INCLUDED***

**COMPLIMENTARY
FULLY ESCORTED
TOURS INCLUDED**

**14 - 15 Nights
Departing September, 2024**

This *amazing* holiday includes:

All-Inclusive Cruise*
12 night full-board cruise on board
Celebrity Millennium®
***Book a Veranda or above an receive an all-inclusive
basis on the cruise**
Complimentary Classic Drinks Package*, Wi-Fi and Tips

Visiting*: Tokyo, Mt Fuji (Shimizu), Kyoto (overnight in
port), Hiroshima, Busan, Hakodate, Aomori, Tokyo
Complimentary Hotel Stay
Two-night four-star hotel stay at the Grand Nikko
Tokyo Daiba

Complimentary Fully Escorted Tours
Tour of Mount Fuji including the Hakone Ropeway
cable car, boat trip across Lake Ashi, high-speed bullet
train to Tokyo and half-day Tokyo city tour^

All flights and transfers
(London departure - regional flights available)

INSIDE <i>from*</i> £3,399^{PP}	OCEAN VIEW <i>from*</i> £3,999^{PP}
VERANDA <i>from*</i> £4,499^{PP}	CONCIERGE CLASS <i>from*</i> £4,799
AQUACLASS® <i>from*</i> £5,799	

Main image is intended for illustrative purposes only. *Prices, itinerary and duration shown are based on September 22, 2024 departure. ^Tour only included on the 22nd September 2024 departure. September 11, 2024 departure includes a 3 night hotel stay in Tokyo.



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: ASA7788

Uncover Japan – an exhilarating country fusing tradition with fresh innovation and landscapes scattered in autumn cherry blossoms – with a two-night hotel stay in Tokyo, a Mount Fuji tour, and an all-inclusive* cruise.

Your enchanting voyage begins with a two-night stay, allowing you to delve into its captivating metropolis, and relish an unforgettable fully escorted tour of the sacred Mount Fuji. This memorable tour will highlight this iconic mountain’s imposing beauty enhanced by sprinklings of ‘akizakura’, or cosmos – the autumn cherry blossoms. Then, witness an awe-inspiring sky ride on the Hakone Ropeway Cable Car and a scenic boat trip across the serene Lake Ashi.

Next, you’ll join Celebrity Millennium® for your 12-night all-inclusive* cruise. A vessel oozing sophistication, Celebrity Millennium® offers a refined cruising experience with the finest modern comforts, so settle in on board as you’re transported to some of Japan’s best coastal destinations.

Highlights of your cruise include a visit to Shimizu where, providing the weather is bright, you’ll be gifted glimpses of the symbolic Mount Fuji, and an overnight stay in port at Osaka’s Kyoto. Next, encounter the glimmering beaches of South Korea in the opulent coastal city of Busan before cruising to the city of Hakodate, which abounds in diverse and historic architectural sights. Conclude your cruise a short sail away in Aomori, where you’ll soak up Japan’s quintessential landscapes, including misty hot springs and snow-dusted mountains.

Disembarking Celebrity Millennium®, you’ll transfer to Tokyo’s international airport to begin your return journey.

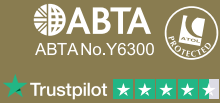


Discover Mount Fuji

More than 200,000 people climb the snow-capped summit of Mount Fuji every year, located in Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. Its elegant shape has been depicted in paintings and literary works since ancient times, with many locals worshipping the fire deity who dwells within the mountain.

Visitors can hike to the top or take the Hakone Ropeway cable car, admiring the view often shrouded by an atmospheric layer of cloud. Then it’s on to Lake Ashi, where you’ll take a boat across the still and peaceful water, enjoying the serene natural beauty of the Crater Lake.

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Sunday, May 14, 2023

In partnership with Imagine Cruising®

26 NIGHTS
FROM
£3,799^{PP*}

Taj Mahal, the Himalayas and all-inclusive Celebrity voyage

The Celebrity Millennium® Experience

Delightful design, with clever use of natural light throughout its public areas, enhances the stunningly attractive ambience of this beautiful cruise ship and promotes an atmosphere of calm openness from the moment you board. The Celebrity Millennium® oozes sophistication and is a superb choice for those looking for a refined and elegant cruise with all the modern facilities you could imagine.

Celebrity **X** Cruises®

12 NIGHT FIVE-STAR
FULLY ESCORTED GOLDEN
TRIANGLE TOUR AND
SCENIC RAIL JOURNEY

CLASSIC DRINKS, WI-FI &
TIPS INCLUDED

24 - 27 Nights

Departing Nov, 2024 - Feb, 2025

This *amazing* holiday includes:

All-Inclusive Cruise

14 night all-inclusive cruise on board
Celebrity Millennium®
Classic Drinks Package, Wi-Fi and Tips

Visiting*: Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Phuket,
Hambantota, Colombo, Cochin, Goa, Mumbai, Delhi,
Agra, Ranthambore National Park, Jaipur, Delhi, Shimla,
Delhi

Fully Escorted Tours

Tour of the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort, game drives
through Ranthambore National Park, tour of Amber
Fort by Jeep, Hawa Mahal and the City Palace, trail walk
through the Himalayas, Shimla sightseeing city tour and
a tour of Jama Masjid Mosque, Red Fort and Rajgha

Rail Journeys

Shatabdi Express to and from Kalka and a one day rail
journey from Kalka to Shimla on board the Shimla Toy
Train

Hotel Stays

Four-star hotel stays in Delhi, Agra, Ranthambore
National Park, Jaipur and Shimla
All hotel stays include breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

INSIDE *from**
£3,799^{PP}

OCEAN VIEW *from**
£4,299^{PP}

VERANDA *from**
£4,799^{PP}

CONCIERGE CLASS *from**
£5,299^{PP}

AQUACLASS® *from**
£6,199^{PP}

*Price, duration and itinerary are based on November 22, 2024
departure date. *Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed.



ONLINE CRUISE CODE: **ASA7764**

Marvel at the awe-inspiring wonders of India's famed Golden Triangle during a fully escorted tour, a magical safari experience and an unforgettable rail journey through the Himalayas before an all-inclusive cruise on board Celebrity Millennium®.

Your holiday begins in Singapore for a one-night hotel stay before you'll embark the magnificent Celebrity Millennium® for your refined cruise. Highlights of your voyage include Thailand's idyllic Phuket, an island renowned for its beaches hugged by coconut palms and vibrant coral reefs. You'll also stop in nature-filled Hambantota and laid-back Goa, a picturesque state nestled on the southwestern coast of India.

Disembarking in Mumbai, you'll enjoy an overnight in port before you'll explore India's iconic treasures during a fully escorted tour of the Golden Triangle. You'll begin in enigmatic Delhi and discover its multi-layered history and street life before reaching Agra. Here, you'll encounter India's most iconic landmark, the resplendent Taj Mahal, a true architectural feat of white marble.

A two-night adventure in the thrilling Ranthambore National Park then awaits, where you'll embark on jungle safari drives. From your open-topped car, you'll search for some of India's most elusive wildlife, from regal Bengal tigers to Indian rhinoceros.

During a two-night hotel stay in the 'Pink City' of Jaipur, you'll explore the beguiling Amber Fort before you'll relish scintillating Delhi once more for an overnight hotel stay. Taking the Shatabdi Express to Kalka, you'll connect to the Shimla Express for a three-night hotel stay in Shimla, exploring the Himalayas on a walking trail, before transferring back to Delhi.



Discover Ranthambore National Park

Centred around the impressive 10th-century Ranthambore Fort, Ranthambore National Park is home to an enthralling scattering of old mosques, temples, hunting pavilions and a wealth of diverse flora and fauna.

The park's dry deciduous forests and grasslands establish Ranthambore one of the best national parks in India.

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All-inclusive classic Danube river cruise and Prague discovery



SAVE UP TO
£800
PER COUPLE*



A-ROSA DONNA

Nine Nights from £1,499^{pp}[^]
Departing Jun - Oct, 2023

This amazing holiday includes:

All-Inclusive River Cruise

- Seven-night all-inclusive Danube River cruise on board A-Rosa Donna
- All meals, snacks, afternoon tea and BBQ on the sun deck
 - All drinks, all day and evening*
 - Complimentary Wi-Fi
 - Complimentary room service
 - Complimentary use of on board bikes at selected times

Hotel Stay

Two-night four-star hotel stay at the Vienna House Diplomat Prague or similar with breakfast
Optional upgrade available to the five-star Jalta boutique hotel or similar

Visiting[^]: Engelhartszell, Vienna, Esztergom, Budapest, Bratislava, Krems an der Donau, Melk, Engelhartszell

All Flights and Transfers included

PRICES FROM*

OUTSIDE	JULIET BALCONY
£1,499 ^{pp}	£2,199 ^{pp}

[^]Prices and itinerary shown are based on October 5, 2023 departure date.
^{*}Exclusions, like branded drinks and champagne are extra. ⁺Prices include discount and savings based on passengers sharing an Outside cabin departing October 5, 2023.

Shimla Express and India’s Golden Triangle

12 Nights from £1,999^{pp}[^]
Departing Oct, 2023 - Mar, 2024

This amazing holiday includes:

Rail Journey

One-day rail journey from Kalka to Shimla on board the Himalayan Queen Toy Train

Fully Escorted Tours

- Tour of Jama Masjid Mosque, Raj Ghat, Humayun’s Tomb, Qutub Minar and more
Tour of the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri
Tour of Amber Fort, Hawa Mahal, the City Palace, Jantar Mantar Observatory and more
Trail walk through the Himalayas
Game drives through Ranthambore National Park*
Shimla sightseeing city tour

Hotel Stays

Five-star hotel stays in Delhi, Shimla, Agra, Ranthambore and Jaipur
All hotel stays include breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

NEW DATES ADDED FOR 2023 AND 2024

PRICES FROM*

TWIN SHARE
£1,999 ^{pp}

⁺Price based on January, 2023 departure. ^{*}Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed. Tour may operate in reverse direction for certain departure dates.



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Sunday, May 14, 2023

In partnership with Imagine Holidays®

11 NIGHTS
FROM
£4,999^{PP}[^]

Zambezi river cruise, game safaris, Victoria Falls and Cape Town stay

ZAMBEZI QUEEN
LUXURY AFRICAN RIVER SAFARI

The Zambezi Queen Experience

As a guest on board the Zambezi Queen, an elegant houseboat meets floating boutique hotel, you'll enjoy a luxurious river safari journey, while in the height of comfort. As the Zambezi Queen slowly navigates the Chobe River, you'll be fully immersed in the majesty and stillness of the African bush, with all its magnificent sights and sounds.

SAVE UP TO
£800
PER COUPLE⁺
ENDS 18.05.23

11 Nights
Departing Jan - Dec, 2024

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Full-Board Cruise

- Two-night full-board luxury cruise on board Zambezi Queen
- Water-based game viewing and bird watching
- Cultural tour of a local village

Fully Escorted Tours

- Full-day Cape Peninsula tour
- Two game drives per day in Pilanesberg National Park
- Walking tour of Victoria Falls

Hotel Stays

- Three-night four-star hotel stay in Cape Town at the Southern Sun the Cullinan with breakfast
- Three-night four-star hotel stay in Pilanesberg National Park at the Shepherd's Tree Game Lodge with breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Three-night five-star stay at The Victoria Falls Hotel with breakfast

All Flights and Transfers

(London departure - regional flights available)

NEW DATES ADDED

STANDARD SUITE ^{from}[^]
£4,999^{PP}

MASTER SUITE[^]
£6,299^{PP}

[^]Prices based on January 6, 2024 departure. Master suite based on December 7, 2024 departure. *Wildlife sightings are not guaranteed. +Prices shown include discount and savings based on two passengers sharing a Standard Suite departing April 15, 2024.

Experience a thrilling South African adventure with a captivating three-night Cape Town stay, adrenaline-inducing safaris, memorable encounters with the spectacular Victoria Falls and an enthralling cruise on the luxurious Zambezi Queen.

Your once-in-a-lifetime African holiday begins in Cape Town, South Africa's 'Mother City'. A highlight of your three-night stay will be a fascinating Cape Peninsula tour, enjoying dramatic ocean views and wonderful wildlife encounters with Cape Fur seals and penguins.

Flying to Pilanesberg for a three-night safari stay at the four-star Shepherd's Tree Game Lodge, you'll enter vast South African bushveld and the private game reserve of Pilanesberg National Park to enjoy twice-daily, guided game drives and educational nature walks. During your time here, there will be ample opportunity to observe magnificent African wildlife, including the iconic Big Five: elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and rhinoceros*.

A flight to Zambia then follows where you'll transfer to historic Livingstone, gateway to Victoria Falls, the planet's biggest waterfall and the Seventh Wonder of the Natural World. During your three-night stay, you'll explore the almighty falls on a guided walking tour and relish a stay in a luxury resort affording unlimited free access to this unforgettable spectacle.

In a fitting finale, in Botswana's Kasane, you'll embark the opulent Zambezi Queen, a floating boutique hotel in elegant 'houseboat' style for an unforgettable two-night cruise along the Chobe River between Botswana and Namibia. Amid breathtakingly African riverscapes, you'll join memorable water-based safaris to encounter resident wildlife, go birdwatching and join a cultural tour to a remote Namibian village.

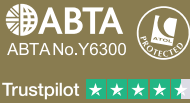


Discover Pilanesberg National Park

A thrilling safari experience awaits at Pilanesberg National Park, a game reserve area of breathtaking beauty and serenity.

During your stay, you'll join daily game drives in Pilanesberg National Park, a thrilling way to experience the incredible African wilderness and wildlife. Here, you'll track down Africa's Big Five—elephant, lion, leopard, Cape buffalo and rhino*.

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14 NIGHTS
FROM
£3,299^{PP*}

All-inclusive Cambodia and Vietnam Mekong river cruise





Cruise on board Mekong Navigator

Step into a bygone era of charming and nostalgic sophistication enhanced by luxurious modern amenities on board Lotus' luxurious Mekong Navigator. On board you'll find an expansive sun deck, atmospheric dining room and a lounge area complete with a bar, library, internet lounge and fitness centre with a spa. Luxuriate on board as this phenomenal vessel transports you downstream whilst your every need is taken care of.



ADDITIONAL DATES JUST LAUNCHED FOR 2024 & 2025

14 Nights
Departing Jan, 2024 - Apr, 2025

This *amazing* holiday includes:

Luxury Hotel Stays
Three-night five-star hotel stay in Phan Thiet at the Anantara Mui Ne Resort
Two-night five-star stay in Ho Chi Minh City at the Grand Hotel Saigon
Two-night five-star hotel stay in Siem Reap at the Borei Angkor Resort & Spa
All hotel stays include breakfast

All-Inclusive Cruise
Seven-night all-inclusive river cruise on board Mekong Navigator
Visiting*: Mỹ Tho, Cái Bè, Sa Đéc, Mỹ An Hưng, Long Khánh Island, Phnom Penh, Angkor Ban, Wat Hanchey, Siem Reap

Fully Escorted Tours
Củ Chi Tunnels
Angkor Wat

All Flights & Transfers
(London departure)

PRICES from	SUPERIOR SUITE	VISTA SUITE	SIGNATURE SUITE	PRESTIGE SUITE	GRANDE SUITE
JAN, 2024	£3,799 ^{PP}	£4,199 ^{PP}	£4,599 ^{PP}	£5,199 ^{PP}	£5,799 ^{PP}
MAR, 2024	£3,299 ^{PP}	£3,599 ^{PP}	£4,099 ^{PP}	£4,699 ^{PP}	Sold Out
APR, 2024	£3,699 ^{PP}	£4,099 ^{PP}	£4,499 ^{PP}	£5,199 ^{PP}	£5,699 ^{PP}
OCT, 2024	£3,499 ^{PP}	Sold Out	£4,299 ^{PP}	£4,799 ^{PP}	£5,399 ^{PP}
NOV, 2024	£3,699 ^{PP}	£4,099 ^{PP}	£4,499 ^{PP}	£4,999 ^{PP}	£5,499 ^{PP}
JAN, 2025	£3,699 ^{PP}	£4,099 ^{PP}	£4,499 ^{PP}	£4,999 ^{PP}	£5,499 ^{PP}
FEB, 2025	£3,599 ^{PP}	£3,899 ^{PP}	£4,399 ^{PP}	Sold Out	Sold Out
MAR, 2025	£3,799 ^{PP}	£3,999 ^{PP}	£4,299 ^{PP}	£5,099 ^{PP}	£5,699 ^{PP}
APR, 2025	£3,799 ^{PP}	£3,999 ^{PP}	£4,299 ^{PP}	£5,099 ^{PP}	£5,699 ^{PP}

*Price and itinerary based on March 2024 departure. Itinerary may operate in reverse depending on departure date.

Delve into southeast Asia’s wonders with a series of discovery tours, a mystical Mekong River cruise and a sumptuous beachfront haven stay.

Your epic adventure begins in charming Phan Thiết, where you’ll delight in a phenomenal three-night hotel escape, enjoying exceptional beachfront views. A two-night hotel stay in Ho Chi Minh City awaits, complete with a fully escorted tour of the captivating and complex Củ Chi Tunnels – a labyrinthian must-see sight for history enthusiasts.

Next, you’ll savour an all-inclusive cruise along the Mekong River on board Lotus’ charming Mekong Navigator. On board, you’ll encounter welcoming staff, opulent accommodations, as well as a Cambodian-themed dinner in the evening.

Perhaps the world’s most fascinating river cruise, this lavish journey will capture your imagination, transporting you to a world of ancient temples and pagodas, Buddhist monasteries, and busy port towns. You’ll sail first to Cái Bè, uncovering waterways lined with lush greenery, before calls at vibrant Mỹ An Hưng A and charming Long Khánh Island await.

Discover vibrant Cambodia with an overnight in port in Phnom Penh – visiting shining Buddhist memorials and captivating museums that tell of the country’s tragic history – before uncovering golden-hued architecture in Angkor Ban.

Bid a fond farewell to Mekong Navigator in Siem Reap, where you’ll conclude your holiday with a luxury two-night stay and an enthralling tour of the temple-rich Angkor Wat.

Enjoy a luxury beach stay

At the Anantara Mui Ne Resort you’ll experience the ultimate getaway in the realms of pure tropical bliss. Here your stay will embrace seaside elegance and Vietnamese charm, making for the perfect start to your holiday. The beachfront infinity pool is the perfect place to spend lazy days, or if you’re looking to be more active, there are cookery classes and yoga on the beach, as well as windsurfing, sailing and snorkelling.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

T Best Places to Work 2023

POWERED BY

WorkL

JUST THE JOB

From benefits to bonuses, wellbeing to inclusivity, here are the top-rated employers – by the people who work there





**BEST AND
BRIGHTEST**

WITH MARTHA LANE FOX

Finding the sweet spot of employee contentment has long been an interest of mine, and I have gone to great lengths to understand how to create a happy working environment. I even went as far as co-founding Lucky Voice – a chain of private-room karaoke bars – partly to help ease workplace tensions. From the outset, our mission was to “spread happiness”.

I’ll forgive those for whom crooning along to pop hits sparks little joy, but the happy feelings experienced by our customers helped the business expand. Just as crucial has been the happiness of our employees at Lucky Voice. Whatever the industry – from hospitality to financial services and beyond – or the size of the company, engaged workers cause firms to thrive.

The relationship between staff contentment and a firm’s productivity is one I see played out time and time again. Companies invest heavily in attracting talent, yet often fall short at retaining these same valuable team members – which is why the organisations listed here deserve all the credit due them. I admire these companies for opening their doors to The Sunday Times Best Places to Work employee survey. It’s hard to make bold business decisions and even harder to do so under public scrutiny.

At these Best Places to Work, progressive workplace practices are hardwired. Whether working from hybrid locations or within flexible timeframes, enjoying high levels of employee wellbeing, thoughtful perks or beneficial training, staff at these companies are enjoying the best of British business.

Many firms face employee and skills shortages in this tightened labour market. In the scramble to cope with the “great resignation” and catch up with Covid-19’s home-working experiment, perhaps some could benefit from prioritising more creative employee engagement.

I have long been aligned with the vision of the WorkL career development platform. It is driven by a belief in the potential of happier employees transforming business and wider society. It offers more than noble aims, though. The workplace and employee data collected by WorkL provides more insight on the happiest companies to work for than anyone else in the world.

If you don’t see your employer listed in this supplement, or in the digital edition available at thetimes.co.uk/bestplacestowork, why not? Maybe it’s time to put happiness at the heart of your career and search out a Best Place to Work.

Martha Lane Fox co-founded lastminute.com and Lucky Voice. She is president of the British Chambers of Commerce, chancellor of the Open University and sits on multiple boards
Twitter: @marthalanefox

Fortune smiles on a happy workforce



While dispirited workers are costing some firms millions of pounds a year, businesses that care about staff wellbeing are reaping the rewards. But what makes them some of the best places to work? By Senay Boztas



WorkL

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020 4576 1730

ILLUSTRATION: ABBEY LOSSING

Are you happy at work? For the sake of your employer, let’s hope so. Findings from a total of 36,000 organisations in 106 countries by the career development platform WorkL show firms that make their people feel content perform better too.

Unhappy employees are costing Britain millions of pounds, according to Lord Mark Price, the former trade minister and managing director of Waitrose. It is a state of affairs that WorkL, which he founded in 2017, has been beavering away to put right.

Lord Price is uniquely able to bring 34 years’ experience working at the John Lewis Partnership to the data gleaned from WorkL’s extensive study.

“We’ve been able to figure out, from a qualitative and a quantitative point of view, what the real benefits are of having a happier and more engaged workforce,” he says, recalling one

financial institution that had below-average engagement scores.

“We calculated that the cost of their sick absence and staff turnover and loss of productivity was £2.5 million a year.” Upping its staff engagement figures to the average rate would save £1 million, WorkL found.

“So although people think of this as being quite fluffy, it’s hard-nosed,” says Lord Price.

Employees who aren’t happy represent a measurable “flight risk”, WorkL’s research indicates. Men aged between 25 and 44 are particularly prone to leaving their jobs, representing wasted investment in training and possibly a costly recruitment process.

He identifies the six elements that drive a happy workplace – attributes that abound among the employers featured in The Sunday Times Best Places to Work.

Some top firms are generous with compensation – for instance,

CALCULATING THE RESULTS

The Sunday Times Best Places to Work lists of Britain’s top employers are produced in partnership with the employee-experience platform WorkL, which helps organisations to recruit, and measure, track and improve staff engagement. The top ten lists by organisation size and our special award winners appear here. For the full Best Places to Work listings visit thetimes.co.uk/bestplacestowork.

The Sunday Times Best Places to Work survey uses 35 questions from WorkL’s employee engagement survey, developed by behavioural scientists, data analysts, psychologists, business leaders, academics and other independent parties to most accurately monitor employee engagement and wellbeing in the workplace.

To achieve a high overall engagement score, a company must consistently perform well across WorkL’s six-step framework, encompassing:

1. Reward and Recognition
2. Instilling Pride
3. Information Sharing
4. Empowerment
5. Wellbeing
6. Job Satisfaction

It is not possible to trade off one dimension against another – in a highly engaged workplace all six steps will be seen positively by employees, albeit to varying degrees.

Each of WorkL’s Six Steps consists of between three and five key elements, which are measured on a 0-10 scale. An organisation’s overall engagement score is the sum of all question responses, divided by the maximum possible value as a percentage.

This Sunday Times Best Places to Work survey asks employees to respond to statements including:

- I am happy with the hours I work
- I am fairly paid
- I am recognised when I do something well
- I do something worthwhile
- I feel proud to work for my organisation
- Information is regularly and openly shared with me
- I have enough information (and training) to do my job
- My views are heard at work
- I understand the organisation’s plan
- I am trusted to make decisions
- I have what I need to do my job well
- My employer cares for my wellbeing
- I rarely feel anxious or depressed about work
- I feel happy at work
- I am treated with respect
- I have a good relationship with my manager
- I am being developed
- I work in a well-run organisation

To be successfully accredited as a Sunday Times Best Place to Work, organisations must achieve a minimum 70 per cent overall engagement score. Our banding threshold is based on both independent and WorkL commissioned research on employee engagement initiatives and is reinforced by WorkL’s benchmarking data of more than 36,000 organisations.

For an accurate representation of employee sentiment, organisations were required to send the survey to as many current employees as possible. Those participating had to reach these minimum average response rates to qualify: Very big, 40 per cent; Big, 50 per cent; Medium, 50 per cent; Small, 60 per cent.

WINNING FORMULAS

5%

Percentage of salary offered by London-based telecoms firm Vorboss to its 368 employees for ‘life-enhancing training’

£45k

Minimum average salary – plus bonuses – offered to staff at Middlesbrough tech firm Big Bite Creative

25–44

Men between these ages are particularly prone to leaving their jobs

is pretty critical to whether you are happy or not at work,” says Lord Price.

At London interior design studio Albion Nord, staff are encouraged to visit exhibitions “to benefit growth”; Britain’s top employers typically invest in professional management training rather than employing managers as if by accident.

Wellbeing falls into three areas, notes Lord Price: mental, physical and financial. “The physical one is straightforward. If, say, you work in a factory or an area where health and safety is a big issue, is that being taken care of? If you are disabled, is the organisation managing that disability with you?”

With increasing numbers of people identifying with mental illness, “is the organisation aware of that? Are you able to manage the mental struggles you may be having?” And then it’s financial: “Does the organisation help you if you have financial difficulty? If it does, how?”

Staff wellbeing is an area where great companies get inventive. Hamilton Barnes Associates, the recruiter, brings in a barber or eyelash technician once a month; the marketing platform Awin runs rural retreats. Several firms offer hardship loans to their employees.

And finally, pride is key: the thing that makes you feel a company is yours and you share its success.

“The anecdote that I tell most often is when President Kennedy went to visit Nasa before it put a man on the moon,” says Lord Price. “He said to the janitor, ‘What do you do?’ The janitor replied, ‘I’m putting a man on the moon.’ He had a huge amount of pride in his job because he saw its place within what everybody there was trying to achieve.”



At Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, one of the top ten very big organisations, employees such as this nurse are encouraged to contact the chief executive directly with any questions they may have

Plum Moore, Dinesh Vitharanage and Laura Cannon of tails.com, where 57 registered office dogs help make it one of the top ten best big places to work

“Although people think of this as being quite fluffy, it’s hard-nosed

PHOTOGRAPHY: VICKI COUCHMAN

a performance bonus and uncapped commission at recruitment agency Carrington West, average salaries of above £45,000 at Big Bite Creative or a share scheme at NextWave Consulting.

But reward and recognition are not just financial. Saying “thank you” can also make an impact. “On average in the UK, we say ‘thank you’ and congratulate people on a job well done every two months,” says Lord Price.

“It matters to people to feel they are doing something that’s been recognised as worthwhile.”

Sharing information is important to ensure staff understand why business choices are made and their own role. Employees at Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust are encouraged to “ask Ify” – the chief executive Dr Ify Okocha – their questions directly.

Empowerment means trusting people to do their jobs. “We don’t wallow in mistakes,” as the podcast and radio production agency, Fresh Air Production, puts it. “There are no witch hunts.” At the7stars media agency, employees can work from anywhere worldwide for four weeks a year.

Job satisfaction is also driven by career development or the sense of learning within a job, plus the direct relationship with your manager. “This

Good company: the 40 most

Explore the best of the Best Places to Work with these top tens, listed by organisation size

VERY BIG ORGANISATIONS

2,000+ EMPLOYEES

Arcadis
The hashtag #ProudToBeMe is shorthand at this London design and engineering consultancy for making its 4,536 staffers feel accepted. They are encouraged to bring their “authentic self” to work, where perks include health insurance and up to 27 days’ paid holiday. There are family-friendly policies designed to benefit employees of all genders.

CGI
Employees at this global IT and business consultancy with a London base are known as “members” because 85 per cent are shareholders. The firm sponsors professional training and its 6,304 staff have access to a wealth of benefits, such as medical cover and a retirement plan pension, gym membership, cheaper electric-vehicle leasing and extra paid holiday.

Childbase Partnership
As co-owners of the business, all 2,299 employees of Childbase are invested in early years care and education. Based in Newport Pagnell, the firm committed £8.5 million last year in extra “cost of living” support for staff at its 43 nurseries, with increased salaries, free meals at work and discounted shopping deals.

David Lloyd Leisure
Perks are fit for purpose at David Lloyd Leisure, whose 5,749 workers receive free membership and use of its gyms and pools. Last winter, the Hatfield-based group offered everyone a daily hot meal, whether or not they were on shift. People connect via an app and can join management development programmes.

FatFace
This clothes designer and retailer wants to help its 2,500 staff be “at their natural best, with a healthy culture that’s made for life”. The Havant-based business employs a hybrid working model, a badge scheme for colleagues to highlight each

other’s achievements and prizes of Raleigh bikes.

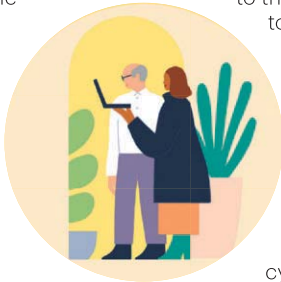
MBDA
“Dynamic working” is one of the targets at this European missile developer and manufacturer, whose UK base is in Stevenage. Most of the 4,916 UK employees can work from home or juggle an early finish on Fridays. There is private healthcare, an annual bonus, enhanced parental leave and subsidised restaurants.

OVO Energy
The 4,242 workers at this Bristol-based renewable energy and utilities company have up to three paid days a year to volunteer for good causes. An extra 9 per cent of their salary is for flexible benefits such as gym memberships, while OVO’s “zero carbon” ambition encourages cycling to work and tech recycling.

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust
The trust’s values – “We’re kind, we’re fair, we listen, we care” – were chosen by its 4,000 employees, based in Dartford, who have a staff forum and wellbeing champions. The organisation has around 46 per cent black and ethnic minority representation and a commitment to “improve equality and inclusion to create an anti-racist organisation”.

PizzaExpress
When the cost of living crisis hit last year, PizzaExpress gave its 9,242 employees four free pizzas a month to eat with family and friends. The motto here is “express yourself” and one ingredient in its secret sauce is loyalty: half of the managers were promoted from within the Uxbridge-based business.

Veolia
Ecological transformation is the aspiration of this London-based water, waste and energy management company, which has a digitally connected workforce of 5,098. Work patterns are flexible and there’s a career development programme designed to boost the number of women in operational positions. Veolia also offers a share scheme and wellbeing benefits.



BIG ORGANISATIONS

250-1,999 EMPLOYEES

Awin
Flexibility is the norm for staff at Awin, an affiliate marketing platform. It allows the 441 London-based employees to work either four days a week or three plus two half-days, and there are opportunities in 16 offices worldwide, alongside a wellness programme and access to mental health coaches.

Benefex
This technology business makes software to help companies in 80 countries manage their employee benefits. Unsurprisingly, it puts that experience into practice with its own 513 employees. The Southampton-based firm is 50 per cent women-led, surveys staff every month and acts on their suggestions, such as modifying processes for new starters with dyslexia.

Churchill Retirement Living
Clinton McCarthy isn’t just co-founder and managing director of this retirement-property builder, he’s also one of its trained mental health first-aiders. This private company, based in Ringwood, Hampshire supports its 393 employees with training programmes,

peer-to-peer awards and a social committee that organises day trips and quiz nights.

HE Simm Group
There’s a promote-from-within policy at this 75-year-old mechanical and engineering contractor, started by Ernie Simm and now run by his grandson, Gareth. The 337 employees include 33 families apart from the Simms. People at the Liverpool-based business have access to free training and take part in charity schemes.

Mowgli Street Food
Charity is on the menu at this Liverpool-based Indian street food chain with 17 restaurants. For each full-time employee in the workforce of 652, the Mowgli Trust sponsors a child in India. Staff can also travel to India to learn about charitable projects and the cuisine’s history.

Octopus Energy
The growing London-based green energy business has 1,846 employees, a new Japanese arm and plans to build wind farms across Europe. It has created a podcast to help with recruitment and developed diverse interview panels. Employees get equity options and a tax-efficient scheme to lease an electric vehicle.

tails.com
A nine-day fortnight is being trialled to keep tails wagging at this dog-food delivery firm. The 324 staff in Richmond, southwest London, can work flexible hours

MEDIUM ORGANISATIONS

50-249 EMPLOYEES

Ancorise
The Bracknell tech firm, specialising in Google Cloud services, runs a training programme to help people from a range of backgrounds to kick-start their careers. Among a recent cohort of its graduates, 60 per cent were female and 33 per cent self-taught “techies”. The company offers its 106 staff private medical care, two volunteering days per year and a flexible work-from-abroad policy.

Carrington West
Regular social events reinforce the attitude that everyone is valued at this Portsmouth-based technical recruitment business, operating in sectors such as town planning. The 98 staff receive weekends away, private medical cover, uncapped commission and a company performance bonus, as well as hardship loans where needed.

easyJet Holidays
Every two weeks, the 187 employees of this Luton-based tour operator have “permission to pause” by taking two hours away from their job to do something to help their wellbeing.

The firm aims to make work a pleasure too, with team events as well as a share scheme, flight discounts and holiday vouchers.

11 Investments
London-based 11 Investments, founded by Joe Curtis, Andy Sellers and Charlie Rawstron, is a group of recruitment brands with 104 staff. To ensure “everyone loves what they do and never wants to leave”, as one employee puts it, perks include private medical insurance and a £500 annual wellbeing allowance.

Hamilton Barnes Associates
Company growth at this London-based network engineering recruiter can lead to career progression for go-getting staff. One employee who started as a consultant nine years ago now heads its US operation. Support for the 110 workers comes from mental health and personal development coaches, wellness days and Luna, the office dog.

Itecco
A personal financial adviser is on hand to help Manchester-based recruiter Itecco’s 51 staff manage their money. An annual fully funded ski trip for top billers, monthly achievers club and consultant of the month bonus, plus a generous pension and life insurance cover, are part of its rewards package.

NextWave Consulting
Everyone is a shareholder at NextWave, which helps financial

services companies with data analytics, fintech and automation. Its 56 staff in London have 10 “learning days” a year and can earn a bonus for finding new business. A social impact training programme supports young people from diverse backgrounds.

Quooker UK
Not only do the 98 employees here have free Deliveroo lunches, they also get 50 per cent off their own Quooker “tap that does it all”, for boiling, filtered, chilled and sparkling water. Staff at the Dutch family firm’s Manchester office can bring in their pets, dress casually and enjoy social events.

SiXworks
People can aim high at this defence tech consultancy, which has worked with the RAF. The business, based in Farnborough, Hampshire, has 63 employees who enjoy private medical care, annual bonuses and monthly lunch-and-learn sessions. A Wednesday coffee morning quiz, started during the pandemic, is now a permanent fixture.

Xalient Holdings
Martina isn’t an employee at the IT consultancy Xalient but does a vital job – as an AI monitoring tool. The Leeds firm combines tech with a human touch to look after its 170 employees. There is a company bonus scheme, as well as global career opportunities and access to a wellbeing app.

loved

and fuss over 57 registered office dogs. “Nothing lightens the mood in a meeting like a dog gnawing on an antler,” notes one employee.

The Edwin Group

A collection of companies, The Edwin Group recruits and supplies teachers and support staff for schools. Carbon negative, the Newcastle upon Tyne firm wants to “positively impact the lives of young people” – it has invested £600,000 to support mental health, attendance, sports and creative arts in schools. Its 263 staff benefit from 31 days’ annual holiday, four weeks’ paid paternity leave and management training.

the7stars

Employees at this London-based media agency can work from anywhere worldwide for four weeks. It believes in giving its 284 people a voice – they voted for dogs in the office – and runs company-wide retreats to Osea Island, Essex. The office is equipped with a bar serving prosecco on tap.

Vorboss

Connectivity is key at telecommunications outfit Vorboss, which provides a high-speed business fibre network to London firms. Based in the capital, it gives the 368 employees 5 per cent of their salary (up to £2,500) for “life-enhancing training”, from leadership courses to swimming lessons. Other benefits include private medical care.



Installation technician Rochelle Cornish working in the field for Vorboss, which is highly commended as one of the best workplaces for women



Leonardo Ramos Vjeira's employer, PizzaExpress, promotes half its managers from within

“Everyone loves what they do and never wants to leave

– 11 Investments

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SMALL ORGANISATIONS

10-49 EMPLOYEES

Albion Nord

The 15 employees of this London interior design studio work partly from home but are encouraged to visit galleries and exhibitions to benefit their development. Perks at the company, which aims to create “spaces with a sense of place”, include private medical insurance and suitably stylish summer and winter parties.

Better Placed

Owned jointly by its 37 employees, this Leeds-based recruitment agency offers incentive trips to Cape Town, Dubai and Las Vegas, plus bonus schemes and gym membership. The firm recruits for jobs in digital companies, tech and marketing while fostering an environment in which its own people tend to stay put.

Big Bite Creative

Lunch is free as well as healthy for the Big Bite Creative team, who help organisations improve how they publish their digital content. The Middlesbrough tech firm offers its 28 employees an average salary above £45,000 plus bonuses, and

everyone gets £750 a year for learning resources or attending industry events.

DeskLodge

With its motto “Looks like work, feels like fun”, DeskLodge has plenty to live up to, which is why its staff of 11 are offered Audible membership, monthly lunches, weekends away and £500 annual training allowances (plus free sweets on Fridays). The Bristol-based business runs offices and shared working space.

Fintelligent Search

Staff fitness is ingrained at Fintelligent Search, which offers extended gym lunch breaks to its 12 employees. Based in snazzy new office space in Manchester, the financial services, insurance and legal recruitment company provides flexitime, trips overseas, early-finish Fridays and 12 “star days” of extra annual leave based on performance.

Fresh Air Production

It’s nice to be recognised and this London enterprise with a staff of 12 reckons it has the “loudest cohort at award ceremonies”. Run by friends Neil Cowling (founder), Michaela Hallam and Richard Blake, it makes podcasts and radio programmes, with a culture of cooperation and a transparent salary structure.

Leaders in Care Recruitment

This Manchester firm really is a listening employer – when one of the 31 employees at Leaders in Care Recruitment wins a deal,

their computer plays them a personalised song. The firm, which finds people for jobs in healthcare and biotechnology, offers incentives such as company holidays and up to 12 extra days off a year.

Lemongrass Marketing

Four days a week are for work at Lemongrass Marketing – and the fifth, for the 13 employees, is set aside for volunteering, hobbies or just enjoying life. The Bicester-based travel PR company has a hybrid working policy, and perks include travel insurance, private healthcare and a bonus scheme.

Re-Flow

Teams are tight at Re-Flow, a field management software provider based in Exeter. Helping them bond are regular social activities, from group dinners to paintballing and virtual reality parties. A growing business, Re-Flow pays for certifications, training and courses for its 24 employees, while perks include dental and eye-care plans, a pension and a cycle-to-work scheme.

SWC Partnership

The SWC Partnership mantra is “Live, learn, evolve” and in that spirit, the Tunbridge Wells-based marketing agency, founded in 2014, was acquired by global agency UP There. Everywhere in February 2023. Hours are flexible and location is hybrid: the 12 employees typically work two days a week in the office.

An employer for everyone

The Sunday Times Best Places to Work survey spotlights companies that foster engaged and inclusive workplace cultures – where employee happiness and wellbeing is prioritised. In these special awards we acknowledge some of these organisations’ unique qualities and achievements in excelling within specific areas and demographic groups. The categories highlighted here were established using self-selected responses provided anonymously by Best Places to Work employees. The award winners were chosen for their policies and actions, not just for their high engagement scores, using minimum response rate requirements to ensure representative samples. For each category, a company of each size is credited either as a winner or highly commended.

BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR WOMEN

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

OVO (very big)

With its eye on future talent, OVO offers a bigger referral fee when an employee recommends a new recruit for areas with lower diversity, such as women in tech or women in field services. Flexible ways of working are hardwired at the Bristol-based energy supplier, which also offers staff shared parental leave and days off to mark “moments that matter”, plus unlimited compassionate leave, menopause support and “recharge” time off. Its female respondents to our survey give OVO an 89.2 per cent engagement score.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Vorboss (big)

The female employees who responded to our survey give Vorboss, which is dedicated to providing London businesses with a fast fibre network, a 90 per cent score for employee engagement. Supporting them are benefits including personal and period days, a progressive parental leave policy and “back-up care” for parents and carers.

VIOOH (medium)

This London digital out-of-home marketing firm has a gender neutral parents’ policy that offers the same leave, pay and support to all employees having a baby through pregnancy, adoption or surrogacy, with up to 26 weeks’ full pay and a £5,000 return to work bonus. Plus, there’s a wellbeing policy with support for neurodiversity. Female staff give VIOOH a 91.9 per cent engagement score.

Appetite for Business (small)

This Microsoft Cloud technologies agency has achieved a 50-50 gender balance among its 18 staff, led by founder Sheryl Newman, one of Cancer Research UK’s women of influence. Staff can choose where they work – “particularly beneficial to female colleagues with children who were facing barriers to career progression”, the firm says. Female employees give it a 99 per cent employee engagement score.

BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR DISABLED EMPLOYEES

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust (very big)

In our survey, 102 of this trust’s workers identified as disabled – the highest number across Best Places to Work. Its disabled employees scored Oxleas 73 per cent for engagement. The Dartford-based health organisation is signed up to the Disability Confident Committed employer scheme, which pledges to remove barriers to disabled people, and there’s a staff network for those with a disability or long-term conditions.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Benefex (big)

United@Benefex is an employee-led group that

focuses on diversity and inclusion, among other key issues, providing a forum for staff to share their lived experiences. The Southampton tech business, which makes the OneHub software that helps firms manage their employee benefits, wants to be a “diverse, inclusive and accessible place to work”. Its disabled respondents give Benefex an 89.9 per cent engagement score.

The Grand, York (medium)

The five-star hotel in York is a member of the government’s Disability Confident scheme, which supports employers to make the most of the talents disabled people can bring to the workplace. Around one in ten respondents to our survey identified as disabled, the highest

proportion among all Best Places to Work, and they report stellar rates of engagement at 90.7 per cent. A member of the Splendid Hospitality Group, The Grand, York works with a range of partners, including learning disability charity Mencap, to support job seekers.

Electra Learning (small)

Electra Learning’s Aberdeen office is part of a network that also includes bases in Calgary, Toronto and Houston. The firm specialises in IT change management and offers exchange trips between its countries. With a UK workforce of 34, almost a tenth (three people) of Electra Learning staff identify as disabled and are a highly engaged cohort, scoring 98 per cent for engagement.



Mowgli founder Nisha Katona, whose restaurant chain was highly commended

“
We get
innovative
ideas through
a diverse
workplace

– Arcadis



BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

Arcadis (very big)

This design and engineering firm invites its “Arcadians” to be #ProudToBeMe – and works to foster a diverse and inclusive workforce where staff can feel proud to be themselves at work. Almost one fifth of the employees surveyed come from a Black, Asian or ethnic minority background, and this group gives the firm an 87 per cent engagement score. Dutch-owned Arcadis was ranked among the top ten employers in the 2021 Ethnicity Awards. “It is through a diverse workplace that we get innovative ideas that make a difference to our projects,” says one employee. “All Arcadis colleagues are meant to feel part of an inclusive culture that allows them to give their very best self.”

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Mowgli Street Food (big)

In partnership with the World Vision charity, street food business Mowgli sponsors a child in need in India for each full-time employee hired. Each year, the Liverpool-based company sends 40 team members to India to see this charity work in action and to learn about the dishes served in the chain’s 17 restaurants. Staff get festive holidays off and 30 days’ annual leave, and all come together at Mowgli Fest, which features live music, free food and drinks, a funfair and recognition awards. Its ethnic minority respondents score it 87.9 per cent for engagement.

Boult Wade Tennant (medium)

Working with social mobility charity The Sutton Trust, intellectual property firm Boult Wade Tennant recruits students to its work experience schemes. Staff at the London-based firm are members of IP Inclusive – an organisation that seeks to improve equality, diversity and inclusion within intellectual property – while the in-house diversity and inclusion committee has commissioned a benchmarking survey to help with inclusivity. Staff from ethnic minority backgrounds report 97.1 per cent engagement.

r10 (small)

London management consultancy r10 aims to be inclusive and its ethnic minority employees score it 98 per cent for engagement. “We are dedicated to building a truly inclusive workforce – a place that represents the diversity of our modern society, with opportunities to grow and succeed based on our own merits,” says the firm. Everyone has a “talent pathway”, there is training on topics such as unconscious bias and cultural sensitivity, and policies are based on individual needs.

BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR 16 TO 34-YEAR-OLDS

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

11 Investments (medium)
Recruiter 11 Investments is certainly a buzzing place for employees aged between 16 and 34 – more than two thirds of our survey respondents were in this age group. Described by one staffer as a “high-energy”, “ambitious” and “social” operation, 11 Investments puts on monthly get-togethers and quarterly events, including a summer ball. The London firm provides a £500 annual wellbeing allowance, unlimited holidays, trips abroad and complimentary breakfasts, fruit and drinks.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Childbase Partnership (very big)
More than half (55 per cent) of Childbase respondents in our survey fall into the 16-34 age bracket, expressing high rates of engagement at 83.5 per cent. All employees of the early years education provider are co-owners of the company. Collectively, they work at 45 nurseries, where free staff meals were part of an £8.5 million investment in cost of living support last year. Charity fundraising and environmental initiatives contribute to the culture, and more than 700 employees have over six years’ service.

Awin (big)
The London office of global affiliate marketing platform Awin is one of 17 worldwide. Cross-department collaboration, creativity and communication are valued at the company, which attracts new talent via internships and working student programmes, as well as through global exchange programmes and experienced hires. Staffers aged 16 to 34 give Awin a 90 per cent score for engagement overall.

Fintelligent Search (small)
Manchester recruiter Fintelligent Search offers structured career progression via its career planner, outlining what each employee needs to achieve to reach their next grade – in turn bringing them a pay rise, improved commission and extra benefits. Three quarters of the respondents in the 16-34 age group score it 99.3 per cent for engagement.

BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR WELLBEING

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

Quooker (medium)
Quooker, which makes those handy, do-everything kitchen taps, achieves an impressive 97 per cent engagement score for wellbeing among our survey’s respondents. Helping to create such contentment are the daily free lunches from Deliveroo for the Manchester-based team, the casual dress code and the fact that pets are welcome in the office. Everyone gets their birthday off, paid, while team social events happen regularly and the company offers a cycle to work scheme. Quooker also invests in an employee assistance programme that supports people’s broader financial, physical and mental wellbeing.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

CGI (very big)
This global firm wants staff to “bring their whole selves to work while respecting their work-life balance” – and with an 88 per cent wellbeing engagement score in our survey, it appears to be hitting the right notes. Based in London, the UK arm of CGI offers medical cover, while its Oxygen health and wellbeing scheme encompasses mental health first aiders, ergonomic assessments and preventative health advice. Counselling and support can be accessed free via its employee assistance programme.

tails.com (big)
There are 57 registered office dogs at pet food retailer tails.com, an average of six employees (there are 324 in total) per four-legged friend. The Richmond-based firm trialled a nine-day fortnight for all staff in January and hybrid working is encouraged. The Bippit service provides staff with professional financial coaching, and there are complimentary counselling services. Tails.com earns an 89 per cent wellbeing engagement score from staff.

Big Bite Creative (small)
Staff choose the working hours and location they feel most comfortable and productive with at WordPress agency Big Bite Creative. The Middlesbrough firm offers a wellbeing programme that includes free healthy lunches, while office social and relaxation zones foster downtime. Employees can access free counselling services and entry to events such as Tough Mudder. Big Bite Creative gained a 98 per cent wellbeing engagement score.

BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR LGBTQIA+ EMPLOYEES

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

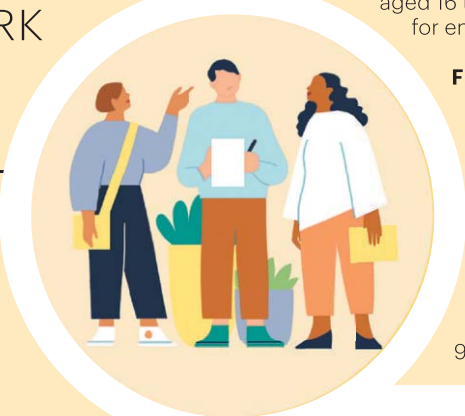
Thomas Franks (big)
Family-owned and run contract caterer Thomas Franks says it is driven to be different – and staff members of all orientations and sexuality feel welcome. There is a diversity and inclusion group that celebrates the diverse workforce, its aims supported by the board of directors who strive “to promote and improve diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging throughout Thomas Franks”, says one employee at the Oxfordshire-based firm. An engagement score of 93.8 per cent among LGBTQIA+ respondents to our survey validates the good intentions.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

CGI (very big)
The LGBTQIA+ and allies network at the London-based arm of global IT and business consulting firm CGI is a member-led group for staff of alternate sexuality or gender identity. It marks significant dates in the LGBTQIA+ calendar and holds regular social events, while also working on CGI policies, recruitment and confidential support. Engagement scores among the respondents to our survey who identify as LGBTQIA+ are resoundingly high, at 90.6 per cent.

easyjet Holidays (medium)
LGBTQIA+ employees at this Luton-based holiday arm of the easyJet business – launched in 2019 – are highly engaged with their work, reporting a 96.6 per cent score. There’s access for all staff to in-house management and development schemes, training courses with Accenture and an online learning academy. Perks include “significant discounts” on flights, annual holiday vouchers and a shares scheme.

5 Squirrels (small)
Staff at Brighton skincare manufacturer 5 Squirrels have been working a four-day week since June 2022. Office hours are Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm, meaning staff get “100 per cent of their salary for 80 per cent of their time in return for 100 per cent productivity”, the company tells us. It also celebrates the backgrounds, experiences and perspectives of its staff: two extra “bank holidays” are given – one for the annual Pride weekend in Brighton and another for World Mental Health Day.



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BEST PLACES TO WORK FOR EMPLOYEES AGED 55+

THE SPECIAL AWARD WINNER

The Goring (medium)
Built by chief exec Jeremy Goring’s great-grandfather Otto in 1910, this London institution is a place for all generations. One in ten of those who responded to our staff survey is over 55 and this group gives The Goring a resolute thumbs up, scoring it 90 per cent for engagement. A stone’s throw away from Buckingham Palace, the hotel fosters a “culture of kindness”. Head doorman Peter Sweeney has celebrated 58 years’ service. Perks for both young and old include free chiropodist treatments for tired feet, yoga and meditation classes.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Veolia (very big)
More than a quarter of Veolia’s employee

respondents are over 55. The London water, waste and energy management solutions firm tells us its “future of work” team is looking into how it can improve support for the older workforce with specific initiatives – and its 76.8 per cent engagement score from this demographic shows it is on the right track. Perks include a share scheme, occupational health provision and financial wellbeing advice.

Churchill Retirement Living (big)
One in ten respondents to our employee survey ticks the 55 or over box at this retirement home company, where trust, openness, respect, communication and honesty are the company values. Churchill is proud to support an older workforce and says it offers fulfilling work – the 87.8 per cent engagement score recorded

by the over-55s in our survey shows it’s doing the right thing. The firm’s headquarters are in Hampshire but more than three quarters of staff work in standalone roles, coming together at quarterly area meetings for team-building and celebrating success.

Alexander Grace (small)
There is no slowing down for the over-55s at financial services firm Alexander Grace, who give their company a 99.8 per cent overall engagement score. Just under a third of the 36-strong workforce falls into our older age bracket at the Warwickshire firm, which recruits “lovely people who care”, it tells us. Financial and hands-on support helps those on the career ladder obtain industry-recognised qualifications, while links with local charities and regular social events are part of the company culture.



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